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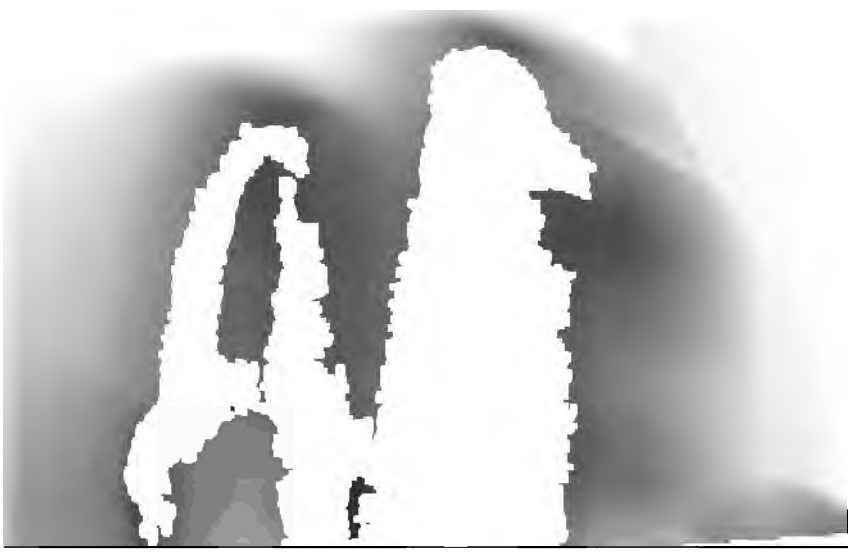

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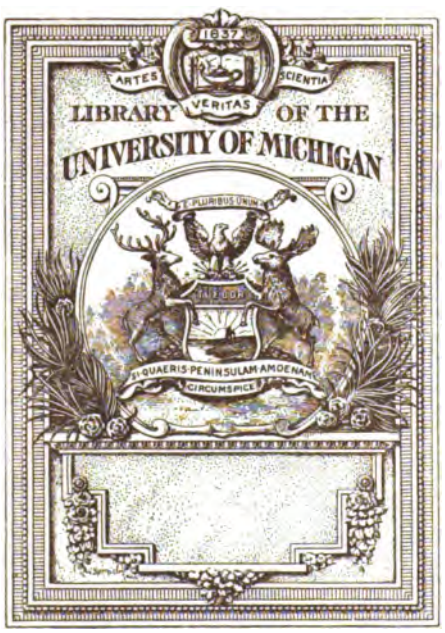
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WILLIAM COWPER.[1]

(1855.)

FOR the English, after all, the best literature is the English. We understand the language; the manners are familiar to us; the scene at home; the associations our own. Of course, a man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea. But we cannot be always seeing the ocean. Its face is always large; its smile is bright; the ever-sounding shore sounds on. Yet we have no property in them. We stop and gaze; we pause and draw our breath; we look and wonder at the grandeur of the other world; but we live on shore. We fancy associations of unknown things and distant climes, of strange men and strange manners. But we are ourselves. Foreigners do not behave as we should, nor do the Greeks. What a strength of imagination, what a long practice, what a facility in the details of fancy is required to picture their past and unknown world! They are deceased. They are said to be immortal, because they have written a good epitaph; but they are gone. Their life and their manners have passed away. We read with interest in the catalogue of the ships—

> "The men of Argos and Tyrintha next,
> And of Hermione, that stands retired
> With Asine, within her spacious bay;
> Of Epidaurus, crowned with purple vines,
> And of Trœzena, with the Achaian youth

[1] *Poetical Works of William Cowper.* Edited by Robert Bell. J. W. Parker and Son.

The Life of William Cowper, with Selections from his Correspondence. Being volume i. of the Library of Christian Biography, superintended by the Rev. Robert Bickersteth. Seeley, Jackson and Co.

Of sea-begirt Ægina, and with thine
Maseta, and the dwellers on thy coast,
Waveworn Eïonæ; . . .
And from Caristus and from Styra came
Their warlike multitudes, in front of whom
Elphenor marched, Calchodon's mighty son.
With foreheads shorn and wavy locks behind,
They followed, and alike were eager all
To split the hauberk with the shortened spear."[1]

But they are dead. "'So am not I,' said the foolish fat scullion."[2] We are the English of the present day. We have cows and calves, corn and cotton; we hate the Russians; we know where the Crimea is; we believe in Manchester the great. A large expanse is around us; a fertile land of corn and orchards, and pleasant hedgerows, and rising trees, and noble prospects, and large black woods, and old church towers. The din of great cities comes mellowed from afar. The green fields, the half-hidden hamlets, the gentle leaves, soothe us with "a sweet inland murmur".[3] We have before us a vast seat of interest, and toil, and beauty, and power, and this our own. Here is our home. The use of foreign literature is like the use of foreign travel. It imprints in early and susceptible years a deep impression of great, and strange, and noble objects; but we cannot live with these. They do not resemble our familiar life; they do not bind themselves to our intimate affection; they are picturesque and striking, like strangers and wayfarers, but they are not of our home, or homely; they cannot speak to our "business and bosoms";[4] they cannot touch the hearth of the soul. It would be better to have no outlandish literature in the mind than to have it the principal thing. We should be like accomplished vagabonds without a country, like men with a hundred acquaintances and no friends. We need an intellectual possession analogous to our own life; which reflects, embodies, improves it; on which we can repose; which will recur to us in the placid moments—which

[1] *Iliad*, book ii., Cowper's translation, revised by Southey.
[2] *Tristram Shandy*, book iv., chap. vii.
[3] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey".
[4] Bacon: Dedication to Essays.

will be a latent principle even in the acute crises of life. Let us be thankful if our researches in foreign literature enable us, as rightly used they will enable us, better to comprehend our own. Let us venerate what is old, and marvel at what is far. Let us read our own books. Let us understand ourselves.

With these principles, if such they may be called, in our minds, we gladly devote these early pages of our journal [1] to the new edition of Cowper with which Mr. Bell has favoured us. There is no writer more exclusively English. There is no one—or hardly one, perhaps—whose excellences are more natural to our soil, and seem so little able to bear transplantation. We do not remember to have seen his name in any continental book. Professed histories of English literature, we dare say, name him; but we cannot recall any such familiar and cursory mention as would evince a real knowledge and hearty appreciation of his writings.

The edition itself is a good one. The life of Cowper, which is prefixed to it, though not striking, is sensible. The notes are clear, explanatory, and, so far as we know, accurate. The special introductions to each of the poems are short and judicious, and bring to the mind at the proper moment the passages in Cowper's letters most clearly relating to the work in hand. The typography is not very elegant, but it is plain and business-like. There is no affectation of cheap ornament.

The little book which stands second on our list belongs to a class of narratives written for a peculiar public, inculcating peculiar doctrines, and adapted, at least in part, to a peculiar taste. We dissent from many of these tenets, and believe that they derive no support, but rather the contrary, from the life of Cowper. In previous publications, written for the same persons, these opinions have been applied to that melancholy story in a manner which it requires strong writing to describe. In this little volume they are more rarely expressed, and when they are it is with diffidence, tact, and judgment.

[1] This was the second article in the first number of the *National Review*.

Only a most pedantic critic would attempt to separate the criticism on Cowper's works from a narrative of his life. Indeed, such an attempt would be scarcely intelligible. Cowper's poems are almost as much connected with his personal circumstances as his letters, and his letters are as purely autobiographical as those of any man can be. If all information concerning him had perished save what his poems contain, the attention of critics would be diverted from the examination of their interior characteristics to a conjectural dissertation on the personal fortunes of the author. The Germans would have much to say. It would be debated in Tübingen who were the Three Hares, why "The Sofa" was written, why John Gilpin was not called William. Halle would show with great clearness that there was no reason why he *should* be called William; that it appeared by the bills of mortality that several other persons born about the same period had also been called John; and the ablest of all the professors would finish the subject with a monograph showing that there was a special fitness in the name John, and that any one with the æsthetic sense who (like the professor) had devoted many years exclusively to the perusal of the poem, would be certain that any other name would be quite "paralogistic, and in every manner impossible and inappropriate". It would take a German to write upon the Hares.

William Cowper, the poet, was born on 26th November, 1731, at his father's parsonage, at Berkhampstead. Of his father, who was chaplain to the king, we know nothing of importance. Of his mother, who had been named Donne, and was a Norfolk lady, he has often made mention, and it appears that he regarded the faint recollection which he retained of her—for she died early—with peculiar tenderness. In later life, and when his sun was going down in gloom and sorrow, he recurred eagerly to opportunities of intimacy with her most distant relatives, and wished to keep alive the idea of her in his mind. That idea was not of course very definite; indeed, as described in his poems, it is rather the abstract idea of what a mother should be, than anything else;

but he was able to recognise her picture, and there is a suggestion of cakes and sugar-plums, which gives a life and vividness to the rest. Soon after her death he was sent to a school kept by a man named Pitman, at which he always described himself as having suffered exceedingly from the cruelty of one of the boys. He could never see him, or think of him, he has told us, without trembling. And there must have been some solid reason for this terror, since—even in those days, when τύπτω meant "I strike," and "boy" denoted a thing to be beaten—this juvenile inflicter of secret stripes was actually expelled. From Mr. Pitman, Cowper, on account of a weakness in the eyes, which remained with him through life, was transferred to the care of an oculist,—a dreadful fate even for the most cheerful boy, and certainly not likely to cure one with any disposition to melancholy; hardly indeed can the boldest mind, in its toughest hour of manly fortitude, endure to be domesticated with an operation chair. Thence he went to Westminster, of which he has left us discrepant notices, according to the feeling for the time being uppermost in his mind. From several parts of the "Tirocinium," it would certainly seem that he regarded the whole system of public school teaching not only with speculative disapproval, but with the painful hatred of a painful experience. A thousand genial passages in his private letters, however, really prove the contrary; and in a changing mood of mind, the very poem which was expressly written to "recommend private tuition at home" gives some idea of school happiness.

"Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the play-place of our early days;
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still,
The bench on which we sat while deep employed,
Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet destroyed;
The little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw;

To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollections of our own delights,
That viewing it, we seem almost t' obtain
Our innocent sweet simple years again.
This fond attachment to the well-known place,
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day."

Probably we pursue an insoluble problem in seeking a suitable education for a morbidly melancholy mind. At first it seems a dreadful thing to place a gentle and sensitive nature in contact, in familiarity, and even under the rule of coarse and strong buoyant natures. Nor should this be in general attempted. The certain result is present suffering, and the expected good is remote and disputable. Nevertheless, it is no artificial difficulty which we here encounter—none which we can hope by educational contrivances to meet or vanquish. The difficulty is in truth the existence of the world. It is the fact, that by the constitution of society the bold, the vigorous, and the buoyant, rise and rule; and that the weak, the shrinking, and the timid, fall and serve. In after-life, in the actual commerce of men, even too in those quiet and tranquil pursuits in which a still and gentle mind should seem to be under the least disadvantage, in philosophy and speculation, the strong and active, who have confidence in themselves and their ideas, acquire and keep dominion. It is idle to expect that this will not give great pain—that the shrinking and timid, who are often just as ambitious as others, will not repine—that the rough and strong will not often consciously inflict grievous oppression—will not still more often, without knowing it, cause to more tremulous minds a refined suffering which their coarser texture could never experience, which it does not sympathise with, nor comprehend. Sometime in life—it is but a question of a very few years at most—this trial must be undergone. There may be a short time, more or less, of gentle protection and affectionate care, but the leveret grows old—the world waits

at the gate—the hounds are ready, and the huntsman too, and there is need of strength, and pluck, and speed. Cowper indeed, himself, as we have remarked, does not, on an attentive examination, seem to have suffered exceedingly. In subsequent years, when a dark cloud had passed over him, he was apt at times to exaggerate isolated days of melancholy and pain, and fancy that the dislike which he entertained for the system of schools, by way of speculative principle, was in fact the result of a personal and suffering experience. But, as we shall have (though we shall not, in fact, perhaps use them all) a thousand occasions to observe, he had, side by side with a morbid and melancholy humour, an easy nature, which was easily satisfied with the world as he found it, was pleased with the gaiety of others, and liked the sight of, and sympathy with, the more active enjoyments which he did not care to engage in or to share. Besides, there is every evidence that cricket and marbles (though he sometimes in his narratives suppresses the fact, in condescension to those of his associates who believed them to be the idols of wood and stone which are spoken of in the prophets) really exercised a laudable and healthy supremacy over his mind. The animation of the scene—the gay alertness which Gray looked back on so fondly in long years of soothing and delicate musing, exerted, as the passage which we cited shows, a great influence over a genius superior to Gray's in facility and freedom, though inferior in the "little footsteps"[1] of the finest fancy,—in the rare and carefully hoarded felicities, unequalled save in the immeasurable abundance of the greatest writers. Of course Cowper was unhappy at school, as he was unhappy always; and of course, too, we are speaking of Westminster only. For Dr. Pitman and the oculist there is nothing to say.

In scholarship Cowper seems to have succeeded. He was

[1] "There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen are showers of violets found;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."—

Verse in Gray's "Elegy," cancelled by him. (Forrest Morgan.)

not, indeed, at all the sort of man to attain to that bold, strong-brained, confident scholarship which Bentley carried to such an extreme, and which, in almost every generation since, some Englishman has been found of hard head and stiff-clayed memory to keep up and perpetuate. His friend Thurlow was the man for this pursuit, and the man to prolong the just notion that those who attain early proficiency in it are likely men to become Lord Chancellors. Cowper's scholarship was simply the general and delicate *impression* which the early study of the classics invariably leaves on a nice and susceptible mind. In point of information it was strictly of a common nature. It is clear that his real knowledge was mostly confined to the poets, especially the ordinary Latin poets and Homer, and that he never bestowed any regular attention on the historians, or orators, or philosophers of antiquity, either at school or in after years. Nor indeed would such a course of study have in reality been very beneficial to him. The strong, analytic, comprehensive, reason-giving powers which are required in these dry and rational pursuits were utterly foreign to his mind. All that was congenial to him, he acquired in the easy intervals of apparent idleness. The friends whom he made at Westminster, and who continued for many years to be attached to him, preserved the probable tradition that he was a gentle and gradual, rather than a forcible or rigorous learner.

The last hundred years have doubtless seen a vast change in the common education of the common boy. The small and pomivorous animal which we so call is now subjected to a treatment very elaborate and careful,—that contrasts much with the simple alternation of classics and cuffs which was formerly so fashionable. But it may be doubted whether for a peculiar mind such as Cowper's, on the intellectual side at least, the tolerant and corpuscular theory of the last century was not preferable to the intolerant and never-resting moral influence that has succeeded to it. Some minds learn most when they seem to learn least. A certain, placid, unconscious, equable in-taking of knowledge suits them, and alone suits them. To succeed in forcing such men to attain great learning is simply

impossible; for you cannot put the fawn into the "Land Transport". The only resource is to allow them to acquire gently and casually in their own way; and in that way they will often imbibe, as if by the mere force of existence, much pleasant and well-fancied knowledge.

From Westminster Cowper went at once into a solicitor's office. Of the next few years (he was then about eighteen) we do not know much. His attention to legal pursuits was, according to his own account, not very profound; yet it could not have been wholly contemptible, for his evangelical friend, Mr. Newton, who, whatever may be the worth of his religious theories, had certainly a sound, rough judgment on topics terrestrial, used in after years to have no mean opinion of the value of his legal counsel. In truth, though nothing could be more out of Cowper's way than abstract and recondite jurisprudence, an easy and sensible mind like his would find a great deal which was very congenial to it in the well-known and perfectly settled maxims which regulate and rule the daily life of common men. No strain of capacity or stress of speculative intellect is necessary for the apprehension of these. A fair and easy mind, which is placed within their reach, will find it has learnt them, without knowing when or how.

After some years of legal instruction, Cowper chose to be called to the bar, and took chambers in the Temple accordingly. He never, however, even pretended to practise. He passed his time in literary society, in light study, in tranquil negligence. He was intimate with Colman, Lloyd, and other wits of those times. He wrote an essay in the *Connoisseur*, the kind of composition then most fashionable, especially with such literary gentlemen as were most careful not to be confounded with the professed authors. In a word, he did "nothing," as that word is understood among the vigorous, aspiring, and trenchant part of mankind. Nobody could seem less likely to attain eminence. Every one must have agreed that there was no harm in him, and few could have named any particular good which it was likely that he would achieve. In after days he drew up a memoir of his life, in which he speaks of those years with deep self-reproach. It was not, indeed, the secular

indolence of the time which excited his disapproval. The course of life had not made him more desirous of worldly honours, but less; and nothing could be further from his tone of feeling than regret for not having strenuously striven to attain them. He spoke of those years in the Puritan manner, using words which literally express the grossest kind of active Atheism in a vague and vacant way; leaving us to gather from external sources whether they are to be understood in their plain and literal signification, or in that out-of-the-way and technical sense in which they hardly have a meaning. In this case the external evidence is so clear that there is no difficulty. The regrets of Cowper had reference to offences which the healthy and sober consciences of mankind will not consider to deserve them. A vague, literary, omnitolerant idleness was perhaps their worst feature. He was himself obliged to own that he had always been considered "as one religiously inclined, if not actually religious,"[1] and the applicable testimony, as well as the whole form and nature of his character, forbid us to ascribe to him the slightest act of license or grossness. A reverend biographer has called his life at this time, "an unhappy compound of guilt and wretchedness". But unless the estimable gentleman thinks it sinful to be a barrister and wretched to live in the Temple, it is not easy to make out what he would mean. In point of intellectual cultivation, and with a view to preparing himself for writing his subsequent works, it is not possible he should have spent his time better. He then acquired that easy, familiar knowledge of terrestrial things—the vague and general information of the superficies of all existence—the acquaintance with life, business, hubbub, and rustling matter-of-fact, which seem odd in the recluse of Olney—and enliven so effectually the cucumbers of the "Task". It has been said that at times every man wishes to be a man of the world, and even the most rigid critic must concede it to be nearly essential to a writer on real life and actual manners. If a man has not seen his brother, how can he describe him? As this world calls happiness and blamelessness, it is not easy to fancy a life more happy—at

[1] Autobiography.

least with more of the common elements of happiness, or more blameless than those years of Cowper. An easy temper, light fancies,—hardly as yet broken by shades of melancholy brooding;—an enjoying habit, rich humour, literary, but not pedantic companions, a large scene of life and observation, polished acquaintance and attached friends: these were his, and what has a light life more? A rough hero Cowper was not and never became, but he was then, as ever, a quiet and tranquil gentleman. If De Béranger's doctrine were true, "*Le bonheur tient au savoir-vivre*," there were the materials of existence here. What, indeed, would not De Béranger have made of them?

One not unnatural result or accompaniment of such a life was that Cowper fell in love. There were in those days two young ladies, cousins of Cowper, residents in London, to one of whom, the Lady Hesketh of after years, he once wrote:—"My dear Cousin,—I wonder how it happened, that much as I love you, I was never in love with you". No similar providence protected his intimacy with her sister. Theodora Cowper, "one of the cousins with whom he and Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row,"[1] was a handsome and vigorous damsel. "What!" said her father, "what will you do if you marry William Cowper?" meaning, in the true parental spirit, to intrude mere pecuniary ideas. "Do, sir!" she replied. "Wash all day, and ride out on the great dog all night!" a spirited combination of domestic industry and exterior excitement. It is doubtful, however, whether either of these species of pastime and occupation would have been exactly congenial to Cowper. A gentle and refined indolence must have made him an inferior washerman, and perhaps to accompany the canine excursions of a wife "which clear-starched," would have hardly seemed enough to satisfy his accomplished and placid ambition. At any rate, it certainly does seem that he was not a very vigorous lover. The young lady was, as he himself oddly said:—

> "Through tedious years of doubt and pain,
> Fixed in her choice and faithful . . . *but in vain*".

[1] Southey, quoting a letter of Cowper to Lady Hesketh.

The poet does indeed partly allude to the parental scruples of Mr. Cowper, her father; but house-rent would not be so high as it is, if fathers had their way. The profits of builders are eminently dependent on the uncontrollable nature of the best affections; and that intelligent class of men have had a table compiled from trustworthy data, in which the chances of parental victory are rated at ·0000000001, and those of the young people themselves at ·9999999999,—in fact, as many nines as you can imagine. "It has been represented to me," says the actuary, "that few young people ever marry without some objection, more or less slight, on the part of their parents; and from a most laborious calculation, from data collected in quarters both within and exterior to the bills of mortality, I am led to believe that the above figures represent the state of the case accurately enough to form a safe guide for the pecuniary investments of the gentlemen," etc., etc. It is not likely that Theodora Cowper understood decimals, but she had a strong opinion in favour of her cousin, and a great idea, if we rightly read the now obscure annals of old times, that her father's objections might pretty easily have been got over. In fact, we think so even now, without any prejudice of affection, in our cool and mature judgment. Mr. Cowper the aged had nothing to say, except that the parties were cousins—a valuable remark, which has been frequently repeated in similar cases, but which has not been found to prevent a mass of matches both then and since. Probably the old gentleman thought the young gentleman by no means a working man, and objected, believing that a small income can only be made more by unremitting industry,—and the young gentleman, admitting this horrid and abstract fact, and agreeing, though perhaps tacitly, in his uncle's estimate of his personal predilections, did not object to being objected to. The nature of Cowper was not, indeed, passionate. He required beyond almost any man the daily society of amiable and cultivated women. It is clear that he preferred such gentle excitement to the rough and argumentative pleasures of more masculine companionship. His easy and humorous nature loved and learned from female detail. But he had no overwhelming

partiality for a particular individual. One refined lady, the first moments of shyness over, was nearly as pleasing as another refined lady. Disappointment sits easy on such a mind. Perhaps, too, he feared the anxious duties, the rather contentious tenderness of matrimonial existence. At any rate, he acquiesced. Theodora never married. Love did not, however, kill her—at least, if it did, it was a long time at the task, as she survived these events more than sixty years. She never, seemingly, forgot the past.

But a dark cloud was at hand. If there be any truly painful fact about the world now tolerably well established by ample experience and ample records, it is that an intellectual and indolent happiness is wholly denied to the children of men. That most valuable author, Lucretius, who has supplied us and others with an inexhaustible supply of metaphors on this topic, ever dwells on the life of his gods with a sad and melancholy feeling that no such life was possible on a crude and cumbersome earth. In general, the two opposing agencies are marriage and money; either of these breaks the lot of literary and refined inaction at once and for ever. The first of these, as we have seen, Cowper had escaped. His reserved and negligent reveries were still free, at least from the invasion of affection. To this invasion, indeed, there is commonly requisite the acquiescence or connivance of mortality; but all men are born, not free and equal, as the Americans maintain, but, in the Old World at least, basely subjected to the yoke of coin. It is in vain that in this hemisphere we endeavour after impecuniary fancies. In bold and eager youth we go out on our travels. We visit Baalbec, and Paphos, and Tadmor, and Cythera,—ancient shrines and ancient empires, seats of eager love or gentle inspiration. We wander far and long. We have nothing to do with our fellow-men. What are we, indeed, to diggers and counters? We wander far; we dream to wander for ever, but we dream in vain. A surer force than the subtlest fascination of fancy is in operation. The purse-strings tie us to our kind. Our travel-coin runs low, and we must return, away from Tadmor and Baalbec back to our steady, tedious industry and dull work, to "*la vieille Europe* (as Napoleon said)

qui m'ennuie". It is the same in thought. In vain we seclude ourselves in elegant chambers, in fascinating fancies, in refined reflections. "By this time," says Cowper, "my patrimony being nearly all spent, and there being no appearance that I should ever repair the damage by a fortune of my own getting, I began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want." However little one is fit for it, it is necessary to attack some drudgery. The vigorous and sturdy rouse themselves to the work. They find in its regular occupation, clear decisions, and stern perplexities, a bold and rude compensation for the necessary loss or diminution of light fancies and delicate musings,—

> "The sights which youthful poets dream,
> On summer eve by haunted stream".[1]

But it was not so with Cowper. A peculiar and slight nature unfitted him for so rough and harsh a resolution. The lion may eat straw like the ox, and the child put his head on the cockatrice' den; but will even then the light antelope be equal to the heavy plough? Will the gentle gazelle, even in those days, pull the slow waggon of ordinary occupation?

The outward position of Cowper was, indeed, singularly fortunate. Instead of having to meet the long labours of an open profession, or the anxious decisions of a personal business, he had the choice among several lucrative and quiet public offices, in which very ordinary abilities would suffice, and scarcely any degree of incapacity would entail dismissal, or reprimand, or degradation. It seemed at first scarcely possible that even the least strenuous of men should be found unequal to duties so little arduous or exciting. He has himself said—

> "Lucrative offices are seldom lost
> For want of powers proportioned to the post;
> Give e'en a dunce the employment he desires,
> And he soon finds the talents it requires;
> A business with an income at its heels,
> Furnishes always oil for its own wheels".[2]

The place he chose was called the Clerkship of the Journals

[1] Milton: "L'Allegro". [2] "Retirement."

of the House of Lords, one of the many quiet haunts which then slumbered under the imposing shade of parliamentary and aristocratic privilege. Yet the idea of it was more than he could bear.

"In the beginning," he writes, "a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain that, if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, as I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom *a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison*, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

"My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever: quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from anybody there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me—a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that, had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue."

As the time of trial drew near, his excitement rapidly increased. A short excursion into the country was attended

with momentary benefit; but as soon as he returned to town he became immediately unfit for occupation, and as unsettled as ever. He grew first to wish to become mad, next to believe that he should become so, and only to be afraid that the expected delirium might not come on soon enough to prevent his appearance for examination before the Lords,—a fear, the bare existence of which shows how slight a barrier remained between him and the insanity which he fancied that he longed for. He then began to contemplate suicide, and not unnaturally called to mind a curious circumstance.

"I well recollect, too," he writes, "that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me."

And he made several attempts to execute his purpose, all which are related in a "Narrative," which he drew up after his recovery; and of which the elaborate detail shows a strange and most painful tendency to revive the slightest circumstances of delusions which it would have been most safe and most wholesome never to recall. The curiously careful style, indeed, of the narration, as elegant as that of the most flowing and felicitous letter, reminds one of nothing so much as the studiously beautiful and compact handwriting in which Rousseau used to narrate and describe the most incoherent and indefinite of his personal delusions. On the whole, nevertheless—for a long time, at least—it does not seem that the life of Cowper was in real danger. The hesitation and indeterminateness of nerve which rendered him liable to these fancies, and unequal to ordinary action, also prevented his carrying out these terrible visitations to their rigorous and fearful consequences. At last, however, there seems to have been possible, if not actual danger,

"Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends; by the help of the buckle I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

"The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, "*'Tis over!*" Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

"When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet: and, reeling and staggering, tumbled into bed again.

"By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter, but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, not at all in pain.

"Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

"I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dis-

patched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room, and apprised him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were: 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office."

It must have been a strange scene; for, so far as appears, the outward manners of Cowper had undergone no remarkable change. There was always a mild composure about them, which would have deceived any but the most experienced observer; and it is probable that Major Cowper, his "kinsman" and intimate friend, had very little or no suspicion of the conflict which was raging beneath his tranquil and accomplished exterior. What a contrast is the "broad piece of scarlet binding" and the red circle, "showing plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity," to the daily life of the easy gentleman "who contributed some essays to the *St. James's Magazine*, and more than one to the *St. James's Chronicle*," living "soft years" on a smooth superficies of existence, away from the dark realities which are, as it were, the skeleton of our life,—which seem to haunt us like a death's head throughout the narrative that has been quoted!

It was doubtless the notion of Cowper's friends, that when all idea of an examination before the Lords was removed, by the abandonment of his nomination to the office in question, the excitement which that idea had called forth would very soon pass away. But that notion was an error. A far more complicated state of mind ensued. If we may advance a theory on a most difficult as well as painful topic, we would say that religion is very rarely the proximate or impulsive cause of madness. The real and ultimate cause (as we speak) is of course that unknown something which we variously call predisposition, or malady, or defect. But the critical and exciting cause seems generally to be some comparatively trivial external occasion, which falls within the necessary lot and life of the person who becomes mad. The inherent excitability is usually awakened by some petty casual stimulant, which looks posi-

tively not worth a thought—certainly a terribly slight agent for the wreck and havoc which it makes. The constitution of the human mind is such, that the great general questions, problems, and difficulties of our state of being are not commonly capable of producing that result. They appear to lie too far in the distance, to require too great a stretch of imagination, to be too apt (for the very weakness of our minds' sake, perhaps) to be thrust out of view by the trivial occurrences of this desultory world,—to be too impersonal, in truth, to cause the exclusive, anxious, aching occupation which is the common prelude and occasion of insanity. Afterwards, on the other hand, when the wound is once struck, when the petty circumstance has been allowed to work its awful consequence, religion very frequently becomes the predominating topic of delusion. It would seem as if, when the mind was once set apart by the natural consequences of the disease, and secluded from the usual occupations of, and customary contact with, other minds, it searched about through all the universe for causes of trouble and anguish. A certain pain probably exists; and even in insanity, man is so far a rational being that he seeks and craves at least the outside and semblance of a reason for a suffering, which is really and truly without reason. Something must be found to justify its anguish to itself. And naturally the great difficulties inherent in the very position of man in this world, and trying so deeply the faith and firmness of the wariest and wisest minds, are ever ready to present plausible justifications or causeless depression. An anxious melancholy is not without very perplexing sophisms and very painful illustrations, with which a morbid mind can obtain not only a fair logical position, but even apparent argumentative victories, on many points, over the more hardy part of mankind. The acuteness of madness soon uses these in its own wretched and terrible justification. No originality of mind is necessary for so doing. Great and terrible systems of divinity and philosophy lie round about us, which, if true, might drive a wise man mad—which read like professed exculpations of a contemplated insanity.

"To this moment," writes Cowper, immediately after the passage which has been quoted, "I had felt no concern of

a spiritual kind." But now a conviction fell upon him that he was eternally lost. "All my worldly sorrows," he says, "seemed as if they had never been; the terrors which succeeded them seemed so great and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself expressly excluded by one chapter; next by another." He thought the curse of the barren fig-tree was pronounced with an especial and designed reference to him. All day long these thoughts followed him. He lived nearly alone, and his friends were either unaware of the extreme degree to which his mind was excited, or unalive to the possible alleviation with which new scenes and cheerful society might have been attended. He fancied the people in the street stared at and despised him—that ballads were made in ridicule of him—that the voice of his conscience was eternally audible. He then bethought him of a Mr. Madan, an evangelical minister, at that time held in much estimation, but who afterwards fell into disrepute by the publication of a work on marriage and its obligations (or rather its *non*-obligations), which Cowper has commented on in a controversial poem. That gentleman visited Cowper at his request, and began to explain to him the gospel.

"He spoke," says Cowper, "of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more on a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

"Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and His righteousness, for our justification. While I heard this part of his discourse, and the Scriptures on which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within me but that this was the gospel of salvation.

"Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation wrought out for me personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted He would bestow upon me. I could only reply, 'I wish He would': a very irreverent petition, but a

very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in His due time, was pleased to answer."

It does not appear that previous to this conversation he had ever distinctly realised the tenets which were afterwards to have so much influence over him. For the moment they produced a good effect, but in a few hours their novelty was over—the dark hour returned, and he awoke from slumber with a "stronger alienation from God than ever". The tenacity with which the mind in moments of excitement appropriates and retains very abstract tenets, that bear even in a slight degree on the topic of its excitement, is as remarkable as the facility and accuracy with which it apprehends them in the midst of so great a tumult. Many changes and many years rolled over Cowper—years of black and dark depression, years of tranquil society, of genial labour, of literary fame, but never in the lightest or darkest hour was he wholly unconscious of the abstract creed of Martin Madan. At the time indeed, the body had its rights, and maintained them.

"While I traversed the apartment, expecting every moment that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me, my conscience scaring me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight, a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and incoherent; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement."

It is idle to follow details further. The deep waters had passed over him, and it was long before the face of his mind was dry or green again.

He was placed in a lunatic asylum, where he continued many months, and which he left apparently cured. After some changes of no moment, but which by his own account evinced many traces of dangerous excitement, he took up his abode at Huntingdon, with the family of Unwin; and it is remarkable how soon the taste for easy and simple, yet not wholly unintellectual society, which had formerly characterised

him, revived again. The delineation cannot be given in any terms but his own:—

"We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life—above all, for a heart to like it."[1]

The scene was not however to last as it was. Mr. Unwin, the husband of Mrs. Unwin, was suddenly killed soon after, and Cowper removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney, where a new epoch of his life begins.

The curate of Olney at this time was John Newton, a man of great energy of mind, and well known in his generation for several vigorous books, and still more for a very remarkable life. He had been captain of a Liverpool slave ship—an occupation in which he had quite energy enough to have succeeded, but was deeply influenced by serious motives, and became one of the strongest and most active of the Low Church clergymen of that day. He was one of those men who seem intended to make excellence disagreeable. He was a converting engine. The whole of his own enormous vigour of body

[1] Letter to Mrs. Cowper, 20th October, 1766.

—the whole steady intensity of a pushing, impelling, compelling, unoriginal mind—all the mental or corporeal exertion he could exact from the weak or elicit from the strong, were devoted to one sole purpose—the effectual impact of the Calvinistic tenets on the parishioners of Olney. Nor would we hint that his exertions were at all useless. There is no denying that there is a certain stiff, tough, agricultural, clayish English nature, on which the aggressive divine produces a visible and good effect. The hardest and heaviest hammering seems required to stir and warm that close and coarse matter. To impress any sense of the supernatural on so secular a substance is a great good, though that sense be expressed in false or irritating theories. It is unpleasant, no doubt, to hear the hammering; the by-standers are in an evil case; you might as well live near an iron-ship yard. Still, the blows do not hurt the iron. Something of this sort is necessary to beat the coarse ore into a shining and useful shape; certainly that does so beat it. But the case is different when the hundred-handed divine desires to hit others. The very system which, on account of its hard blows, is adapted to the tough and ungentle, is by that very reason unfit for the tremulous and tender. The nature of many men and many women is such that it will not bear the daily and incessant repetition of some certain and indisputable truths. The universe has of course its dark aspect. Many tremendous facts and difficulties can be found which often haunt the timid and sometimes incapacitate the feeble. To be continually insisting on these, and these only, will simply render both more and more unfit for the duties to which they were born. And if this is the case with certain fact and clear truth, how much more with uncertain error and mystic exaggeration! Mr. Newton was alive to the consequences of his system: "I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life women lead here, etc., etc., I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them, I believe, *truly gracious people*".[1] He perhaps found his peculiar views more generally appreciated among this class of young ladies than

[1] Letter to Thornton.

among more healthy and rational people, and clearly did not wholly condemn the delivering them, even at this cost, from the tyranny of the "carnal reason".

No more dangerous adviser, if this world had been searched over, could have been found for Cowper. What the latter required was prompt encouragement to cheerful occupation, quiet amusement, gentle and unexhausting society. Mr. Newton thought otherwise. His favourite motto was *Perimus in licitis*. The simple round of daily pleasures and genial employments which give instinctive happiness to the happiest natures, and best cheer the common life of common men, was studiously watched and scrutinised with the energy of a Puritan and the watchfulness of an inquisitor. Mr. Newton had all the tastes and habits which go to form what in the Catholic system is called a spiritual director. Of late years it is well known that the institution, or rather practice, of confession, has expanded into a more potent and more imperious organisation. You are expected by the priests of the Roman Church not only to confess to them what you have done, but to take their advice as to what you shall do. The future is under their direction, as the past was beneath their scrutiny. This was exactly the view which Mr. Newton took of his relation to Cowper. A natural aptitude for dictation—a steady, strong, compelling decision,—great self-command, and a sharp perception of all impressible points in the characters of others,—made the task of guiding "weaker brethren" a natural and pleasant pursuit. To suppose that a shrinking, a wounded, and tremulous mind, like that of Cowper's, would rise against such bold dogmatism, such hard volition, such animal nerve, is to fancy that the beaten slave will dare the lash which his very eyes instinctively fear and shun. Mr. Newton's great idea was that Cowper ought to be of some use. There was a great deal of excellent hammering hammered in the parish, and it was sinful that a man with nothing to do should sit tranquil. Several persons in the street had done what they ought not; football was not unknown; cards were played; flirtation was not conducted "improvingly". It was clearly Cowper's duty to put a stop to such things. Accordingly he made him a parochial imple-

ment; he set him to visit painful cases, to attend at prayer-meetings, to compose melancholy hymns, even to conduct or share in conducting public services himself. It never seems to have occurred to him that so fragile a mind would be unequal to the burden—that a bruised reed does often break; or rather, if it did occur to him, he regarded it as a subterranean suggestion, and expected a supernatural interference to counteract the events at which it hinted. Yet there are certain rules and principles in this world which seem earthly, but which the most excellent may not on that account venture to disregard. The consequence of placing Cowper in exciting situations was a return of his excitement. It is painful to observe, that though the attack resembled in all its main features his former one, several months passed before Mr. Newton would permit any proper physical remedies to be applied, and then it was too late. We need not again recount details. Many months of dark despondency were to be passed before he returned to a simple and rational mind.

The truth is, that independently of the personal activity and dauntless energy which made Mr. Newton so little likely to sympathise with such a mind as Cowper's, the former lay under a still more dangerous disqualification for Cowper's predominant adviser, *viz.*, an erroneous view of his case. His opinion exactly coincided with that which Cowper first heard from Mr. Madan during his first illness in London. This view is in substance that the depression which Cowper originally suffered from was exactly what almost all mankind, if they had been rightly aware of their true condition, would have suffered also. They were "children of wrath," just as he was; and the only difference between them was, that he appreciated his state and they did not,—showing, in fact, that Cowper was not, as common persons imagined, on the extreme verge of insanity, but, on the contrary, a particularly rational and right-seeing man. "So far," Cowper says, with one of the painful smiles which make his "Narrative" so melancholy, "my condition was less desperate." That is, his counsellors had persuaded him that his malady was rational, and his sufferings befitting his true position,—no difficult task, for they had the poignancy of pain

and the pertinacity of madness on their side: the efficacy of their arguments was less when they endeavoured to make known the sources of consolation. We have seen the immediate effect of the first exposition of the evangelical theory of faith. When applied to the case of the morbidly-despairing sinner, that theory has one argumentative imperfection which the logical sharpness of madness will soon discover and point out. The simple reply is: "I do not feel the faith which you describe. I wish I could feel it; but it is no use trying to conceal the fact, I am conscious of nothing like it." And this was substantially Cowper's reply on his first interview with Mr. Madan. It was a simple denial of a fact solely accessible to his personal consciousness; and, as such, unanswerable. And in this intellectual position (if such it can be called) his mind long rested. At the commencement of his residence at Olney, however, there was a decided change. Whether it were that he mistook the glow of physical recovery for the peace of spiritual renovation, or that some subtler and deeper agency was, as he supposed, at work, the outward sign is certain; and there is no question but that during the first months of his residence at Olney, and his daily intercourse with Mr. Newton, he did feel, or supposed himself to feel, the faith which he was instructed to deem desirable, and he lent himself with natural pleasure to the diffusion of it among those around him. But this theory of salvation requires a metaphysical postulate, which to many minds is simply impossible. A prolonged meditation on unseen realities is sufficiently difficult, and seems scarcely the occupation for which common human nature was intended; but more than this is said to be essential. The meditation must be successful in exciting certain feelings of a kind peculiarly delicate, subtle, and (so to speak) unstable. The wind bloweth where it listeth; but it is scarcely more partial, more quick, more unaccountable, than the glow of an emotion excited by a supernatural and unseen object. This depends on the vigour of imagination which has to conceive that object—on the vivacity of feeling which has to be quickened by it—on the physical energy which has to support it. The very watchfulness, the scrupulous anxiety to find and retain the feeling,

are exactly the most unfavourable to it. In a delicate disposition like that of Cowper, such feelings revolt from the inquisition of others, and shrink from the stare of the mind itself. But even this was not the worst. The mind of Cowper was, so to speak, naturally terrestrial. If a man wishes for a nice appreciation of the details of time and sense, let him consult Cowper's miscellaneous letters. Each simple event of every day—each petty object of external observation or inward suggestion, is there chronicled with a fine and female fondness, a wise and happy faculty, let us say, of deriving a gentle happiness from the tranquil and passing hour. The fortunes of the hares—Bess who died young, and Tiney who lived to be nine years old—the miller who engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat having charms that were irresistible—the knitting-needles of Mrs. Unwin—the qualities of his friend Hill, who managed his money transactions—

> "An honest man, close buttoned to the chin,
> Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within"—

live in his pages, and were the natural, insensible, unbiassed occupants of his fancy. It is easy for a firm and hard mind to despise the *minutiæ* of life, and to pore and brood over an abstract proposition. It may be possible for the highest, the strongest, the most arduous imagination to live aloof from common things—alone with the unseen world, as some have lived their whole lives in memory with a world which has passed away. But it seems hardly possible that an imagination such as Cowper's—which was rather a detective fancy, perceiving the charm and essence of things which are seen, than an eager, actuating, conceptive power, embodying, enlivening, empowering those which are not seen—should leave its own home—the *domus et tellus*—the sweet fields and rare orchards which it loved,—and go out alone apart from all flesh into the trackless and fearful and unknown Infinite. Of course, his timid mind shrank from it at once, and returned to its own fireside. After a little, the idea that he had a true faith faded away. Mr. Newton, with misdirected zeal, sought to revive it by inciting him to devotional composition; but

the only result was the volume of "Olney Hymns"—a very painful record, of which the burthen is—

"My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins;
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

"And whither shall I fly?
I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door."

"The Preacher" himself did not conceive such a store of melancholy forebodings.

The truth is, that there are two remarkable species of minds on which the doctrine of Calvinism acts as a deadly and fatal poison. One is the natural, vigorous, bold, defiant, hero-like character, abounding in generosity, in valour, in vigour, and abounding also in self-will, and pride, and scorn. This is the temperament which supplies the world with ardent hopes and keen fancies, with springing energies, and bold plans, and noble exploits; but yet, under another aspect and in other times, is equally prompt in desperate deeds, awful machinations, deep and daring crimes. It one day is ready by its innate heroism to deliver the world from any tyranny; the next it "hungers to become a tyrant" in its turn. Yet the words of the poet are ever true and are ever good, as a defence against the cold narrators who mingle its misdeeds and exploits, and profess to believe that each is a set-off and compensation for the other. You can ever say:—

"Still he retained,
'Mid much abasement, what he had received
From Nature, an intense and glowing mind".[1]

It is idle to tell such a mind that, by an arbitrary irrespective election, it is chosen to happiness or doomed to perdition. The evil and the good in it equally revolt at such terms. It thinks: "Well, if the universe be a tyrant, if one man is doomed to misery for no fault, and the next is chosen to pleasure for no merit—if the favouritism of time be copied into

[1] Wordsworth: *Excursion*, book i.

eternity—if the highest heaven be indeed like the meanest earth,—then, as the heathen say, it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it, better to be the victims of the eternal despotism than its ministers, better to curse in hell than serve in heaven". And the whole burning soul breaks away into what is well called Satanism—into wildness, and bitterness, and contempt.

Cowper had as little in common with this proud, Titanic, aspiring genius as any man has or can have, but his mind was equally injured by the same system. On a timid, lounging, gentle, acquiescent mind, the effect is precisely the contrary—singularly contrasted, but equally calamitous. "I am doomed, you tell me, already. One way or other the matter is already settled. It can be no better, and it is as bad as it can be. Let me alone; do not trouble me at least these few years. Let me at least sit sadly and bewail myself. Action is useless. I will brood upon my melancholy and be at rest;" the soul sinks into "passionless calm and silence unreproved,"[1] flinging away "the passionate tumult of a clinging hope,"[2] which is the allotted boon and happiness of mortality. It was, as we believe, straight towards this terrible state that Mr. Newton directed Cowper. He kept him occupied with subjects which were too great for him; he kept him away from his natural life; he presented to him views and opinions but too well justifying his deep and dark insanity; he convinced him that he ought to experience emotions which were foreign to his nature; he had nothing to add by way of comfort, when told that those emotions did not and could not exist. Cowper seems to have felt this. His second illness commenced with a strong dislike to his spiritual adviser, and it may be doubted if there ever was again the same cordiality between them. Mr. Newton, too, as was natural, was vexed at Cowper's calamity. His reputation in the "religious world" was deeply pledged to conducting this most "interesting case" to a favourable termination. A failure was not to be contemplated, and yet it was obviously coming and coming. It was to no purpose that Cowper acquired fame and secular glory in the

[1] Shelley: "The Sunset". [2] *Ibid.*: "Alastor".

literary world. This was rather adding gall to bitterness. The unbelievers in evangelical religion would be able to point to one at least, and that the best known among its proselytes, to whom it had not brought peace—whom it had rather confirmed in wretchedness. His literary fame, too, took Cowper away into a larger circle, out of the rigid decrees and narrow ordinances of his father-confessor, and of course the latter remonstrated. Altogether there was not a cessation, but a decline and diminution of intercourse. But better, according to the saying, had they "never met or never parted".[1] If a man is to have a father-confessor, let him at least choose a sensible one. The dominion of Mr. Newton had been exercised, not indeed with mildness, or wisdom, or discrimination, but, nevertheless, with strong judgment and coarse acumen—with a bad choice of ends, but at least a vigorous selection of means. Afterwards it was otherwise. In the village of Olney there was a schoolmaster, whose name often occurs in Cowper's letters,—a foolish, vain, worthy sort of man: what the people of the west call a "scholard," that is, a man of more knowledge and less sense than those about him. He sometimes came to Cowper to beg old clothes, sometimes to instruct him with literary criticisms, and is known in the "Correspondence" as "Mr. Teedon, who reads the *Monthly Review*," "Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame". Yet to this man, whose harmless follies his humour had played with a thousand times, Cowper, in his later years, and when the dominion of Mr. Newton had so far ceased as to leave him, after many years, the use of his own judgment, resorted for counsel and guidance. And the man had visions, and dreams, and revelations! But enough of such matters.

The peculiarity of Cowper's life is its division into marked periods. From his birth to his first illness he may be said to have lived in one world, and for some twenty years afterwards, from his thirty-second to about his fiftieth year, in a wholly distinct one. Much of the latter time was spent in hopeless despondency. His principal companions during that period were Mr. Newton, about whom we have been writing, and Mrs.

[1] Burns: "Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest".

Unwin, who may be said to have broken the charmed circle of seclusion in which they lived by inciting Cowper to continuous literary composition. Of Mrs. Unwin herself ample memorials remain. She was, in truth, a most excellent person—in mind and years much older than the poet—as it were by profession elderly, able in every species of preserve, profound in salts, and pans, and jellies; culinary by taste; by tact and instinct motherly and housewifish. She was not however without some less larderiferous qualities. Lady Hesketh and Lady Austen, neither of them very favourably prejudiced critics, decided so. The former has written: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety. . . . I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way." This she showed by persuading Cowper to the composition of his first volume.

As a poet, Cowper belongs, though with some differences, to the school of Pope. Great question, as is well known, has been raised whether that very accomplished writer was a poet at all; and a secondary and equally debated question runs side by side, whether, if a poet, he were a great one. With the peculiar genius and personal rank of Pope we have in this article nothing to do. But this much may be safely said, that according to the definition which has been ventured of the poetical art, by the greatest and most accomplished master of the other school, his works are delicately finished specimens of artistic excellence in one branch of it. "Poetry," says Shelley, who was surely a good judge, "is the expression of the imagination,"[1] by which he meant, of course, not only the expression of the interior sensations accompanying the faculty's employment, but likewise, and more emphatically, the exercise of it in the delineation of objects which attract it. Now society, viewed as a whole, is clearly one of those objects. There is a

[1] *Defence of Poetry.*

vast assemblage of human beings, of all nations, tongues, and languages, each with ideas, and a personality and a cleaving mark of its own, yet each having somewhat that resembles something of all, much that resembles a part of many—a motley regiment, of various forms, of a million impulses, passions, thoughts, fancies, motives, actions; a "many-headed monster thing";[1] a Bashi Bazouk array; a clown to be laughed at; a hydra to be spoken evil of; yet, in fine, our all—the very people of the whole earth. There is nothing in nature more attractive to the fancy than this great spectacle and congregation. Since Herodotus went to and fro to the best of his ability over all the earth, the spectacle of civilisation has ever drawn to itself the quick eyes and quick tongues of seeing and roving men. Not only, says Goethe, is man ever interesting to man, but "properly there is nothing else interesting". There is a distinct subject for poetry—at least according to Shelley's definition—in selecting and working out, in idealising, in combining, in purifying, in intensifying the great features and peculiarities which make society, as a whole, interesting, remarkable, fancy-taking. No doubt it is not the object of poetry to versify the works of the eminent narrators, "to prose," according to a disrespectful description, "o'er books of travelled seamen," to chill you with didactic icebergs, to heat you with torrid sonnets. The difficulty of reading such local narratives is now great—so great that a gentleman in the reviewing department once wished "one man would go everywhere and say everything," in order that the limit of his labour at least might be settled and defined. And it would certainly be much worse if palm-trees were of course to be in rhyme, and the dinner of the migrator only recountable in blank verse. We do not wish this. We only maintain that there are certain principles, causes, passions, affections, acting on and influencing communities at large, permeating their life, ruling their principles, directing their history, working as a subtle and wandering principle over all their existence. These have a somewhat abstract character, as compared with the soft ideals and passionate incarnations of purely individual character,

[1] *Lady of the Lake*, canto vi.

and seem dull beside the stirring lays of eventful times in which the earlier and bolder poets delight. Another cause co-operates. The tendency of civilisation is to pare away the oddness and licence of personal character, and to leave a monotonous agreeableness as the sole trait and comfort of mankind. This obviously tends to increase the efficacy of general principles, to bring to view the daily efficacy of constant causes, to suggest the hidden agency of subtle abstractions. Accordingly, as civilisation augments and philosophy grows, we commonly find a school of "common-sense" poets, as they may be called, arise and develop, who proceed to depict what they see around them, to describe its *natura naturans*, to delineate its *natura naturata*, to evolve productive agencies, to teach subtle ramifications. Complete, as the most characteristic specimen of this class of poets, stands Pope. He was, some one we think has said, the sort of person we cannot even conceive existing in a barbarous age. His subject was not life at large, but fashionable life. He described the society in which he was thrown—the people among whom he lived. His mind was a hoard of small maxims, a quintessence of petty observations. When he described character, he described it, not dramatically, nor as it is in itself; but observantly and from without, calling up in the mind not so much a vivid conception of the man, of the real, corporeal, substantial being, as an idea of the idea which a metaphysical bystander might refine and excruciate concerning him. Society in Pope is scarcely a society of people, but of pretty little atoms, coloured and painted with hoops or in coats—a miniature of metaphysics, a puppet-show of sylphs. He elucidates the doctrine, that the tendency of civilised poetry is towards an analytic sketch of the existing civilisation. Nor is the effect diminished by the pervading character of keen judgment and minute intrusive sagacity; for no great painter of English life can be without a rough sizing of strong sense, or he would fail from want of sympathy with his subject. Pope exemplifies the class and type of "common-sense" poets who substitute an animated "*catalogue raisonné*" of working thoughts and operative principles—a sketch of the then present society, as a whole and as an object, for the *κλέα ανδρῶν* the tale of which is one subject

of early verse, and the stage effect of living, loving, passionate, impetuous men and women, which is the special topic of another.

What Pope is to our fashionable and town life, Cowper is to our domestic and rural life. This is perhaps the reason why he is so national. It has been said no foreigner can live in the country. We doubt whether any people, who felt their whole heart and entire exclusive breath of their existence to be concentrated in a great capital, could or would appreciate such intensely provincial pictures as are the entire scope of Cowper's delineation. A good many imaginative persons are really plagued with him. Everything is so comfortable; the tea-urn hisses so plainly, the toast is so warm, the breakfast so neat, the food so edible, that one turns away, in excitable moments, a little angrily from anything so quiet, tame, and sober. Have we not always hated this life? What can be worse than regular meals, clock-moving servants, a time for everything, and everything then done, a place for everything, without the Irish alleviation—"Sure, and I'm rejiced to say, that's jist and exactly where it isn't," a common gardener, a slow parson, a heavy assortment of near relations, a placid house flowing with milk and sugar—all that the fates can stuff together of substantial comfort, and fed and fatted monotony? Aspiring and excitable youth stoutly maintains it can endure anything much better than the "gross fog Bœotian"—the torpid, in-door, tea-tabular felicity. Still a great deal of tea is really consumed in the English nation. A settled and practical people are distinctly in favour of heavy relaxations, placid prolixities, slow comforts. A state between the mind and the body, something intermediate half-way from the newspaper to a nap—this is what we may call the middle-life theory of the influential English gentleman—the true aspiration of the ruler of the world.

> "'Tis then the understanding takes repose
> In indolent vacuity of thought,
> And sleeps and is refreshed. Meanwhile the face
> Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
> Of deep deliberation." [1]

[1] "The Task."

It is these in-door scenes, this common world, this gentle round of "calm delights," the trivial course of slowly-moving pleasures, the petty detail of quiet relaxation, that Cowper excels in. The post-boy, the winter's evening, the newspaper, the knitting needles, the stockings, the waggon—these are his subjects. His sure popularity arises from his having held up to the English people exact delineations of what they really prefer. Perhaps one person in four hundred understands Wordsworth, about one in eight thousand may appreciate Shelley, but there is no expressing the small fraction who do not love dulness, who do not enter into—

> "Home-born happiness,
> Fireside enjoyments, intimate delights,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know".[1]

His objection to the more exciting and fashionable pleasures was perhaps, in an extreme analysis, that they put him out. They were too great a task for his energies—asked too much for his spirits. His comments on them rather remind us of Mr. Rushworth's—Miss Austen's heavy hero—remark on the theatre: "I think we went on much better by ourselves before this was thought of, doing, doing, doing *nothing*".[2]

The subject of these pictures, in point of interest, may be what we choose to think it, but there is no denying great merit to the execution. The sketches have the highest merit—suitableness of style. It would be absurd to describe a post-boy as a sonneteer his mistress—to cover his plain face with fine similes—to put forward the "brow of Egypt"—to stick metaphors upon him, as the Americans upon General Washington. The only merit such topics have room for is an easy and dexterous plainness—a sober suit of well-fitting expressions—a free, working, flowing, picturesque garb of words adapted to the solid conduct of a sound and serious world, and this merit Cowper's style has. On the other hand, it entirely wants the higher and rarer excellences of poetical expression. There is none of the choice art which has studiously

[1] "The Task." [2] *Mansfield Park*, chap. xix.

selected the words of one class of great poets, or the rare, untaught, unteachable felicity which has vivified those of others. No one, in reading Cowper, stops as if to draw his breath more deeply over words which do not so much express or clothe poetical ideas, as seem to intertwine, coalesce, and be blended with, the very essence of poetry itself.

Of course a poet could not deal in any measure with such subjects as Cowper dealt with, and not become inevitably, to a certain extent, satirical. The ludicrous is in some sort the imagination of common life. The "dreary intercourse"[1] of which Wordsworth makes mention, would be dreary, unless some people possessed more than he did the faculty of making fun. A universe in which Dignity No. I. conversed decorously with Dignity No. II. on topics befitting their state, would be perhaps a levee of great intellects and a tea-table of enormous thoughts; but it would want the best charm of this earth—the medley of great things and little, of things mundane and things celestial, things low and things awful, of things eternal and things of half a minute. It is in this contrast that humour and satire have their place—pointing out the intense unspeakable incongruity of the groups and juxtapositions of our world. To all of these which fell under his own eye, Cowper was alive. A gentle sense of propriety and consistency in daily things was evidently characteristic of him; and if he fail of the highest success in this species of art, it is not from an imperfect treatment of the scenes and conceptions which he touched, but from the fact that the follies with which he deals are not the greatest follies—that there are deeper absurdities in human life than "John Gilpin" touches upon—that the superficial occurrences of ludicrous life do not exhaust, or even deeply test, the mirthful resources of our minds and fortunes.

As a scold, we think Cowper failed. He had a great idea of the use of railing, and there are many pages of laudable invective against various vices which we feel no call whatever to defend. But a great vituperator had need to be a hater; and of any real rage, any such gall and bitterness as

[1] "Tintern Abbey."

great and irritable satirists have in other ages let loose upon men, of any thorough, brooding, burning, abiding detestation, he was as incapable as a tame hare. His vituperation reads like the mild man's whose wife ate up his dinner, "Really, sir, I feel quite *angry!*" Nor has his language any of the sharp intrusive acumen which divides in sunder both soul and spirit, and makes fierce and unforgetable reviling.

Some people may be surprised, notwithstanding our lengthy explanation, at hearing Cowper treated as of the school of Pope. It has been customary, at least with some critics, to speak of him as one of those who recoiled from the artificiality of that great writer, and at least commenced a return to a simple delineation of outward nature. And of course there is considerable truth in this idea. The poetry (if such it is) of Pope would be just as true if all the trees were yellow and all the grass flesh-colour. He did not care for "snowy scalps," or "rolling streams," or "icy halls," or "precipice's gloom". Nor, for that matter, did Cowper either. He, as Hazlitt most justly said, was as much afraid of a shower of rain as any man that ever lived. At the same time, the fashionable life described by Pope has no reference whatever to the beauties of the material universe, never regards them, could go on just as well in the soft, sloppy, gelatinous existence which Dr. Whewell (who knows) says is alone possible in Jupiter and Saturn. But the rural life of Cowper's poetry has a constant and necessary reference to the country, is identified with its features, cannot be separated from it even in fancy. Green fields and a slow river seem all the material of beauty Cowper had given him. But what was more to the purpose, his attention was well concentrated upon them. As he himself said, he did not go more than thirty miles from home for twenty years, and very seldom as far. He was, therefore, well able to find out all that was charming in Olney and its neighbourhood, and as it presented nothing which is not to be found in any of the fresh rural parts of England, what he has left us is really a delicate description and appreciative delineation of the simple essential English country.

However, it is to be remarked that the description of nature in Cowper differs altogether from the peculiar delineation of the same subject, which has been so influential in more recent times, and which bears, after its greatest master, the name Wordsworthian. To Cowper Nature is simply a background, a beautiful background no doubt, but still essentially a *locus in quo*—a space in which the work and mirth of life pass and are performed. A more professedly formal delineation does not occur than the following:—

> "O Winter! ruler of the inverted year,
> Thy scattered hair with sleet-like ashes filled,
> Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
> Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
> Than those of age, thy forehead wrapped in clouds,
> A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
> A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
> But urged by storms along its slippery way;
> I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
> And dreaded as thou art. Thou holdest the sun
> A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
> Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
> And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
> Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
> Compensating his loss with added hours
> Of social converse and instructive ease,
> And gathering, at short notice, in one group
> The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
> Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
> I crown thee King of intimate delights,
> Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.
> No rattling wheels stop short before these gates."[1]

After a very few lines he returns within doors to the occupation of man and woman—to human tasks and human pastimes. To Wordsworth, on the contrary, Nature is a religion. So far from being unwilling to treat her as a special object of study, he hardly thought any other equal or comparable. He was so far from holding the doctrine that the earth was made for men

[1] "The Task."

to live in, that it would rather seem as if he thought men were created to see the earth. The whole aspect of Nature was to him a special revelation of an immanent and abiding power—a breath of the pervading art—a smile of the Eternal Mind—according to the lines which every one knows,—

> "A sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused;
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things".[1]

Of this haunting, supernatural, mystical view of Nature Cowper never heard. Like the strong old lady who said, "*She* was born before nerves were invented," he may be said to have lived before the awakening of the detective sensibility which reveals this deep and obscure doctrine.

In another point of view, also, Cowper is curiously contrasted with Wordsworth, as a delineator of Nature. The delineation of Cowper is a simple delineation. He makes a sketch of the object before him, and there he leaves it. Wordsworth, on the contrary, is not satisfied unless he describe not only the bare outward object which others see, but likewise the reflected high-wrought feelings which that object excites in a brooding, self-conscious mind. His subject was not so much Nature, as Nature reflected by Wordsworth. Years of deep musing and long introspection had made him familiar with every shade and shadow in the many-coloured impression which the universe makes on meditative genius and observant sensibility. Now these feelings Cowper did not describe, because, to all appearance, he did not perceive them. He had a great pleasure in watching the common changes and common aspects of outward things, but he was not invincibly prone to brood and pore over their reflex effects upon his own mind.

> "A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."[2]

[1] Wordsworth; "Tintern Abbey". [2] Wordsworth; "Peter Bell".

According to the account which Cowper at first gave of his literary occupations, his entire design was to communicate the religious views to which he was then a convert. He fancied that the vehicle of verse might bring many to listen to truths which they would be disinclined to have stated to them in simple prose. And however tedious the recurrence of these theological tenets may be to the common reader, it is certain that a considerable portion of Cowper's peculiar popularity may be traced to their expression. He is the one poet of a class which have no poets. In that once large and still considerable portion of the English world which regards the exercise of the fancy and the imagination as dangerous—snares, as they speak—distracting the soul from an intense consideration of abstract doctrine, Cowper's strenuous inculcation of those doctrines has obtained for him a certain toleration. Of course all verse is perilous. The use of single words is harmless, but the employment of two, in such a manner as to form a rhyme —the regularities of interval and studied recurrence of the same sound, evince an attention to time, and a partiality to things of sense. Most poets must be prohibited; the exercise of the fancy requires watching. But Cowper is a ticket-of-leave man. He has the chaplain's certificate. He has expressed himself "with the utmost propriety". The other imaginative criminals must be left to the fates, but he may be admitted to the sacred drawing-room, though with constant care and scrupulous *surveillance*. Perhaps, however, taken in connection with his diseased and peculiar melancholy, these tenets really add to the artistic effect of Cowper's writings. The free discussion of daily matters, the delicate delineation of domestic detail, the passing narrative of fugitive occurrences, would seem light and transitory, if it were not broken by the interruption of a terrible earnestness, and relieved by the dark background of a deep and foreboding sadness. It is scarcely artistic to describe the "painted veil which those who live call life,"[1] and leave wholly out of view and undescribed "the chasm sightless and drear,"[2] which lies always beneath and around it.

It is of "The Task" more than of Cowper's earlier volume

[1] Shelley: "Sonnet," 1813. [2] *Ibid.*

of poems that a critic of his poetry must more peculiarly be understood to speak. All the best qualities of his genius are there concentrated, and the alloy is less than elsewhere. He was fond of citing the saying of Dryden, that the rhyme had often helped him to a thought—a great but very perilous truth. The difficulty is, that the rhyme so frequently helps to the wrong thought—that the stress of the mind is recalled from the main thread of the poem, from the narrative, or sentiment, or delineation, to some wayside remark or fancy, which the casual resemblance of final sound suggests. This is fatal, unless either a poet's imagination be so hot and determined as to bear down upon its objects, and to be unwilling to hear the voice of any charmer who might distract it, or else the nature of the poem itself should be of so desultory a character that it does not much matter about the sequence of the thought—at least within great and ample limits, as in some of Swift's casual rhymes, where the sound is in fact the connecting link of unity. Now Cowper is not often in either of these positions; he always has a thread of argument on which he is hanging his illustrations, and yet he has not the exclusive interest or the undeviating energetic downrightness of mind which would ensure his going through it without idling or turning aside; consequently the thoughts which the rhyme suggests are constantly breaking in upon the main matter, destroying the emphatic unity which is essential to rhythmical delineation. His blank verse of course is exempt from this defect, and there is moreover something in the nature of the metre which fits it for the expression of studious and quiet reflection. "The Task," too, was composed at the healthiest period of Cowper's later life, in the full vigour of his faculties, and with the spur that the semi-recognition of his first volume had made it a common subject of literary discussion, whether he was a poet or not. Many men could endure—as indeed all but about ten do actually in every generation endure—to be without this distinction; but few could have an idea that it was a frequent point of argument whether they were duly entitled to possess it or not, without at least a strong desire to settle the question by some work of decisive excellence. This "The Task" achieved for Cowper. Since its publication

his name has been a household word—a particularly household word in English literature. The story of its composition is connected with one of the most curious incidents in Cowper's later life, and has given occasion to a good deal of writing.

In the summer of 1781 it happened that two ladies called at a shop exactly opposite the house at Olney where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin resided. One of these was a familiar and perhaps tame object,—a Mrs. Jones,—the wife of a neighbouring parson; the other, however, was so striking, that Cowper, one of the shyest and least demonstrative of men, immediately asked Mrs. Unwin to invite her to tea. This was a great event, as it would appear that few or no social interruptions, casual or contemplated, then varied what Cowper called the "duality of his existence". This favoured individual was Lady Austen, a person of what Mr. Hayley terms "colloquial talents"; in truth an energetic, vivacious, amusing, and rather handsome lady of the world. She had been much in France, and is said to have caught the facility of manner and love of easy society, which is the unchanging characteristic of that land of change. She was a fascinating person in the great world, and it is not difficult to imagine she must have been an excitement indeed at Olney. She was, however, most gracious; fell in love, as Cowper says, not only with him but with Mrs. Unwin; was called "Sister Ann," laughed and made laugh, was every way so great an acquisition that his seeing her appeared to him to show "strong marks of providential interposition". He thought her superior to the curate's wife, who was a "valuable person," but had a family, etc., etc. The new acquaintance had much to contribute to the Olney conversation. She had seen much of the world, and probably seen it well, and had at least a good deal to narrate concerning it. Among other interesting matters, she one day recounted to Cowper the story of John Gilpin, as one which she had heard in childhood, and in a short time the poet sent her the ballad, which every one has liked ever since. It was written, he says, no doubt truly, in order to relieve a fit of terrible and uncommon despondency; but altogether, for a few months after the introduction of this new companion, he was more happy and animated than at any other

time after his first illness. Clouds, nevertheless, began to show themselves soon. The circumstances are of the minute and female kind, which it would require a good deal of writing to describe, even if we knew them perfectly. The original cause of misconstruction was a rather romantic letter of Lady Austen, drawing a sublime picture of what she expected from Cowper's friendship. Mr. Scott, the clergyman at Olney, who had taken the place of Mr. Newton, and who is described as a dry and sensible man, gave a short account of what he thought was the real embroilment. "Who," said he, "can be surprised that two women should be daily in the society of one man and then quarrel with *one another?*" Cowper's own description shows how likely this was.

"From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he says to Mr. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused."

Things were in this state when she suggested to him the composition of a new poem of some length in blank verse, and on being asked to suggest a subject, said: "Well, write upon that sofa," whence is the title of the first book of "The Task". According to Cowper's own account, it was this poem which was the cause of the ensuing dissension.

"On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began 'The Task'; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten: and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But

there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect 'The Task,' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol."

And it is possible that this is the true account of the matter. Yet we fancy there is a kind of awkwardness and constraint in the manner in which it is spoken of. Of course the plain and literal portion of mankind have set it down at once that Cowper was in love with Lady Austen, just as they married him over and over again to Mrs. Unwin. But of a strong passionate love, as we have before explained, we do not think Cowper capable, and there are certainly no signs of it in this case. There is, however, one odd circumstance. Years after, when no longer capable of original composition, he was fond of hearing all his poems read to him except "John Gilpin". There were recollections, he said, connected with those verses which were too painful. Did he mean, the worm that dieth not—the reminiscence of the animated narratress of that not intrinsically melancholy legend?

The literary success of Cowper opened to him a far larger circle of acquaintance, and connected him in close bonds with many of his relations, who had looked with an unfavourable eye at the peculiar tenets which he had adopted, and the peculiar and recluse life which he had been advised to lead. It is to these friends and acquaintance that we owe that copious correspondence on which so much of Cowper's fame at present rests. The complete letter-writer is now an unknown animal. In the last century, when communications were difficult, and epistles rare, there were a great many valuable people who devoted a good deal of time to writing elaborate letters. You wrote letters to a man whom you knew nineteen years and a half ago, and told him what you had for dinner, and what your second cousin said, and how the crops got on. Every detail of life was described and dwelt on, and improved. The art of writing, at least of writing easily, was comparatively rare, which kept the number of such compositions within narrow limits. Sir Walter Scott says he knew a man who remembered that the London post-bag once came to Edinburgh

with only one letter in it. One can fancy the solemn conscientious elaborateness with which a person would write, with the notion that his letter would have a whole coach and a whole bag to itself, and travel two hundred miles alone, the exclusive object of a red guard's care. The only thing like it now—the deferential minuteness with which one public office writes to another, conscious that the letter will travel on her Majesty's service three doors down the passage—sinks by comparison into cursory brevity. No administrative reform will be able to bring even the official mind of these days into the grave inch-an-hour conscientiousness with which a confidential correspondent of a century ago related the growth of apples, the manufacture of jams, the appearance of flirtations, and other such things. All the ordinary incidents of an easy life were made the most of; a party was epistolary capital, a race a mine of wealth. So deeply sentimental was this intercourse, that it was much argued whether the affections were created for the sake of the ink, or ink for the sake of the affections. Thus it continued for many years, and the fruits thereof are written in the volumes of family papers, which daily appear, are praised as "materials for the historian," and consigned, as the case may be, to posterity or oblivion. All this has now passed away. Sir Rowland Hill is entitled to the credit, not only of introducing stamps, but also of destroying letters. The amount of annotations which will be required to make the notes of this day intelligible to posterity is a wonderful idea, and no quantity of comment will make them readable. You might as well publish a collection of telegrams. The careful detail, the studious minuteness, the circumstantial statement of a former time, is exchanged for a curt brevity or only half-intelligible narration. In old times, letters were written for people who knew nothing and required to be told everything. Now they are written for people who know everything except the one thing which the letter is designed to explain to them. It is impossible in some respects not to regret the old practice. It is well that each age should write for itself a faithful account of its habitual existence. We do this to a certain extent in novels, but novels are difficult materials for an historian. They

raise a cause and a controversy as to how far they are really faithful delineations. Lord Macaulay is even now under criticism for his use of the plays of the seventeenth century. Letters are generally true on certain points. The least veracious man will tell truly the colour of his coat, the hour of his dinner, the materials of his shoes. The unconscious delineation of a recurring and familiar life is beyond the reach of a fraudulent fancy. Horace Walpole was not a very scrupulous narrator; yet it was too much trouble even for him to tell lies on many things. His set stories and conspicuous scandals are no doubt often unfounded, but there is a gentle undercurrent of daily unremarkable life and manners which he evidently assumed as a datum for his historical imagination. Whence posterity will derive this for the times of Queen Victoria it is difficult to fancy. Even memoirs are no resource; they generally leave out the common life, and try at least to bring out the uncommon events.

It is evident that this species of composition exactly harmonised with the temperament and genius of Cowper. Detail was his forte and quietness his element. Accordingly, his delicate humour plays over perhaps a million letters, mostly descriptive of events which no one else would have thought worth narrating, and yet which, when narrated, show to us, and will show to persons to whom it will be yet more strange, the familiar, placid, easy, ruminating, provincial existence of our great-grandfathers. Slow, Olney might be,—indescribable, it certainly was not. We seem to have lived there ourselves.

The most copious subject of Cowper's correspondence is his translation of Homer. This was published by subscription, and it is pleasant to observe the healthy facility with which one of the shyest men in the world set himself to extract guineas from every one he had ever heard of. In several cases he was very successful. The University of Oxford, he tells us, declined, as of course it would, to recognise the principle of subscribing towards literary publications; but other public bodies and many private persons were more generous. It is to be wished that their aid had contributed to the production of a more pleasing work. The fact is, Cowper was not like

Agamemnon. The most conspicuous feature in the Greek heroes is a certain brisk, decisive activity, which always strikes and always likes to strike. This quality is faithfully represented in the poet himself. Homer is the briskest of men. The Germans have denied that there was any such person; but they have never questioned his extreme activity. "From what you tell me, sir," said an American, "I should like to have read Homer. I should say he was a go-ahead party." Now this is exactly what Cowper was not. His genius was domestic, and tranquil, and calm. He had no sympathy, or little sympathy, even with the common, half-asleep activities of a refined society; an evening party was too much for him; a day's hunt a preposterous excitement. It is absurd to expect a man like this to sympathise with the stern stimulants of a barbaric age, with a race who fought because they liked it, and a poet who sang of fighting because he thought their taste judicious. As if to make matters worse, Cowper selected a metre in which it would be scarcely possible for any one, however gifted, to translate Homer. The two kinds of metrical composition most essentially opposed to one another are ballad poetry and blank verse. The very nature of the former requires a marked pause and striking rhythm. Every line should have a distinct end and a clear beginning. It is like martial music, there should be a tramp in the very versification of it.

> "Armour rusting in his halls,
> On the blood of Clifford calls;
> 'Quell the Scot,' exclaims the lance,
> Bear me to the heart of France,
> Is the longing of the shield:
> Tell thy name, thou trembling field,
> Field of death, where'er thou be,
> Groan thou with our victory."[1]

And this is the tone of Homer. The grandest of human tongues marches forward with its proudest steps: the clearest tones call forward—the most marked of metres carries him on:—

[1] Wordsworth: "Feast of Brougham Castle".

> " Like a reappearing star,
> Like a glory from afar—" [1]

he ever heads, and will head, "the flock of war".[2] Now blank verse is the exact opposite of all this. Dr. Johnson laid down that it was verse only to the eye, which was a bold dictum. But without going this length it will be safe to say, that of all considerable metres in our language it has the least distinct conclusion, least decisive repetition, the least trumpet-like rhythm; and it is this of which Cowper made choice. He had an idea that extreme literalness was an unequalled advantage, and logically reasoned that it is easier to do this in that metre than in any other. He did not quite hold with Mr. Cobbett that the "gewgaw fetters of rhyme were invented by the monks to enslave the people"; but as a man who had due experience of both, he was aware that it is easier to write two lines of different endings than two lines of the same ending, and supposed that by taking advantage of this to preserve the exact grammatical meaning of his author, he was indisputably approximating to a good translation. "Whether," he writes, "a translation of Homer may be best executed in blank verse or in rhyme is a question in the decision of which no man finds difficulty who has ever duly considered what translation ought to be, or who is in any degree practically acquainted with those kinds of versification. . . . No human ingenuity can be equal to the task of closing every couplet with sounds homotonous, expressing at the same time the full sense, and only the full sense, of the original." And if the true object of translation were to save the labour and dictionaries of construing schoolboys, there is no question but this slavish adherence to the original would be the most likely to gain the approbation of those diminutive but sure judges. But if the object is to convey an idea of the general tone, scope, and artistic effect of the original, the mechanical copying of the details is as likely to end in a good result as a careful cast from a dead man's features to produce a living and speaking being. On the whole, therefore, the condemnation remains, that Homer is not dull, and Cowper is.

[1] Wordsworth; "Feast of Brougham Castle". [2] *Ibid.*

With the translation of Homer terminated all the brightest period of Cowper's life. There is little else to say. He undertook an edition of Milton—a most difficult task, involving the greatest and most accurate learning, in theology, in classics, in Italian—in a word, in all ante-Miltonic literature. By far the greater portion of this lay quite out of Cowper's path. He had never been a hard student, and his evident incapacity for the task troubled and vexed him. A man who had never been able to assume any real responsibility was not likely to feel comfortable under the weight of a task which very few men would be able to accomplish. Mrs. Unwin too fell into a state of helplessness and despondency; and instead of relying on her for cheerfulness and management, he was obliged to manage for her, and cheer her. His mind was unequal to the task. Gradually the dark cloud of melancholy, which had hung about him so long, grew and grew, and extended itself day by day. In vain Lord Thurlow, who was a likely man to know, assured him that his spiritual despondency was without ground; he smiled sadly, but seemed to think that at any rate he was not going into Chancery. In vain Hayley, a rival poet, but a good-natured, blundering, well-intentioned, incoherent man, went to and fro, getting the Lord Chief Justice and other dignitaries to attest, under their hands, that they concurred in Thurlow's opinion. In vain, with far wiser kindness, his relatives, especially many of his mother's family, from whom he had been long divided, but who gradually drew nearer to him as they were wanted, endeavoured to divert his mind to healthful labour and tranquil society. The day of these things had passed away —the summer was ended. He became quite unequal to original composition, and his greatest pleasure was hearing his own writings read to him. After a long period of hopeless despondency he died on 25th April, in the first year of this century; and if he needs an epitaph, let us say, that not in vain was he Nature's favourite. As a higher poet sings :—

> "And all day long I number yet,
> All seasons through, another debt,
> Which I, wherever thou art met,
> To thee am owing;

An instinct call it, a blind sense,
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how nor whence,
Nor whither going.

. . . . . .

" If stately passions in me burn,
And one chance look to thee should turn,
I drink out of an humbler urn,
A lowlier pleasure ;
The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life our nature breeds ;
A wisdom fitted to the needs
Of hearts at leisure." [1]

[1] Wordsworth : " To the Daisy ".

THE FIRST EDINBURGH REVIEWERS.[1]

(1855.)

IT is odd to hear that the *Edinburgh Review* was once thought an incendiary publication. A young generation, which has always regarded the appearance of that periodical as a grave constitutional event (and been told that its composition is entrusted to Privy Councillors only), can scarcely believe, that once grave gentlemen kicked it out of doors—that the dignified classes murmured at "those young men" starting such views, abetting such tendencies, using *such* expressions—that aged men said: "Very clever, but not at all sound". Venerable men, too, exaggerate. People say the *Review* was planned in a garret, but this is incredible. Merely to take such a work into a garret would be inconsistent with propriety; and the tale that the original conception, the pure idea to which each number is a quarterly aspiration, ever was in a garret is the evident fiction of reminiscent ages—striving and failing to remember.

Review writing is one of the features of modern literature. Many able men really give themselves up to it. Comments on ancient writings are scarcely so common as formerly; no

[1] *A Memoir of the Rev. Sydney Smith.* By his daughter, Lady Holland. With a Selection from his Letters. Edited by Mrs. Austin. 2 vols. Longmans.

Lord Jeffrey's Contributions to the "Edinburgh Review". A new Edition in one volume. Longmans.

Lord Brougham's Collected Works, vols. i., ii., iii. *Lives of Philosophers of the Reign of George III. Lives of Men of Letters of the Reign of George III. Historical Sketches of the Statesmen who flourished in the Reign of George III.* Griffin.

The Rev. Sydney Smith's Miscellaneous Works. Including his Contributions to the "Edinburgh Review". Longmans.

great part of our literary talent is devoted to the illustration of the ancient masters; but what seems at first sight less dignified, annotation on modern writings was never so frequent. Hazlitt started the question, whether it would not be as well to review works which did not appear, in lieu of those which did—wishing, as a reviewer, to escape the labour of perusing print, and, as a man, to save his fellow-creatures from the slow torture of tedious extracts. But, though approximations may frequently be noticed—though the neglect of authors and independence of critics are on the increase—this conception, in its grandeur, has never been carried out. We are surprised at first sight, that writers should wish to comment on one another; it appears a tedious mode of stating opinions, and a needless confusion of personal facts with abstract arguments; and some, especially authors who have been censured, say that the cause is laziness—that it is easier to write a review than a book—and that reviewers are, as Coleridge declared, a species of maggots, inferior to bookworms, living on the delicious brains of real genius. Indeed, it *would* be very nice, but our world is so imperfect. This idea is wholly false. Doubtless it is easier to write one review than one book: but not, which is the real case, many reviews than one book. A deeper cause must be looked for.

In truth, review writing but exemplifies the casual character of modern literature. Everything about it is temporary and fragmentary. Look at a railway stall; you see books of every colour—blue, yellow, crimson, "ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted," on every subject, in every style, of every opinion, with every conceivable difference, celestial or sublunary, maleficent, beneficent—but all small. People take their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey. The volumes, at least, you can see clearly, are not intended to be everlasting. It may be all very well for a pure essence like poetry to be immortal in a perishable world; it has no feeling; but paper cannot endure it, paste cannot bear it, string has no heart for it. The race has made up its mind to be fugitive, as well as minute. What a change from the ancient volume!—

"That weight of wood, with leathern coat o'erlaid,
These ample clasps, of solid metal made;
The close-press'd leaves, unoped for many an age,
The dull red edging of the well-fill'd page;
On the broad back the stubborn ridges roll'd,
Where yet the title stands in tarnish'd gold".[1]

And the change in the appearance of books has been accompanied — has been caused — by a similar change in readers. What a transition from the student of former ages! —from a grave man, with grave cheeks and a considerate eye, who spends his life in study, has no interest in the outward world, hears nothing of its din, and cares nothing for its honours, who would gladly learn and gladly teach, whose whole soul is taken up with a few books of "Aristotle and his Philosophy,"—to the merchant in the railway, with a head full of sums, an idea that tallow is "up," a conviction that teas are "lively," and a mind reverting perpetually from the little volume which he reads to these mundane topics, to the railway, to the shares, to the buying and bargaining universe. We must not wonder that the outside of books is so different, when the inner nature of those for whom they are written is so changed.

It is indeed a peculiarity of our times, that we must instruct so many persons. On politics, on religion, on all less important topics still more, every one thinks himself competent to think,—in some casual manner does think—to the best of our means must be taught to think—rightly. Even if we had a profound and far-seeing statesman, his deep ideas and long-reaching vision would be useless to us, unless we could impart a confidence in them to the mass of influential persons, to the unelected Commons, the unchosen Council, who assist at the deliberations of the nation. In religion the appeal now is not to the technicalities of scholars, or the fiction of recluse schoolmen, but to the deep feelings, the sure sentiments, the painful strivings of all who think and hope. And this appeal to the many necessarily brings with it a consequence. We must speak to the many so that they

[1] Crabbe: "The Library".

will listen—that they will like to listen—that they will understand. It is of no use addressing them with the forms of science, or the rigour of accuracy, or the tedium of exhaustive discussion. The multitude are impatient of system, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality. They agree with Sydney Smith: "Political economy has become, in the hands of Malthus and Ricardo, a school of metaphysics. All seem agreed what is to be done; the contention is, how the subject is to be divided and defined. *Meddle with no such matters.*" We are not sneering at "the last of the sciences"; we are concerned with the essential doctrine, and not with the particular instance. Such is the taste of mankind.

We may repeat ourselves.

There is, as yet, no Act of Parliament compelling a *bonâ fide* traveller to read. If you wish him to read, you must make reading pleasant. You must give him short views, and clear sentences. It will not answer to explain what all the things which you describe are *not*. You must begin by saying what they are. There is exactly the difference between the books of this age, and those of a more laborious age, that we feel between the lecture of a professor and the talk of the man of the world—the former profound, systematic, suggesting all arguments, analysing all difficulties, discussing all doubts,—very admirable, a little tedious, slowly winding an elaborate way, the characteristic effort of one who has hived wisdom during many studious years, agreeable to such as he is, anything but agreeable to such as he is not: the latter, the talk of the manifold talker, glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in a jest, unfolding unanswerable arguments in an absurd illustration, expounding nothing, completing nothing, exhausting nothing, yet really suggesting the lessons of a wider experience, embodying the results of a more finely tested philosophy, passing with a more Shakespearian transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low, in season and out of season, with a word of illustration for each and a touch of

humour intelligible to all,—fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends, disconnected yet impressing what he maintains. This is the very model of our modern writing. The man of the modern world is used to speak what the modern world will hear; the writer of the modern world must write what that world will indulgently and pleasantly peruse.

In this transition from ancient writing to modern, the review-like essay and the essay-like review fill a large space. Their small bulk, their slight pretension to systematic completeness, their avowal, it might be said, of necessary incompleteness, the facility of changing the subject, of selecting points to attack, of exposing only the best corner for defence, are great temptations. Still greater is the advantage of "our limits". A real reviewer always spends his first and best pages on the parts of a subject on which he wishes to write, the easy comfortable parts which he knows. The formidable difficulties which he acknowledges, you foresee by a strange fatality that he will only reach two pages before the end; to his great grief there is no opportunity for discussing them. As a young gentleman, at the India House examination, wrote "Time up" on nine unfinished papers in succession, so you may occasionally read a whole review, in every article of which the principal difficulty of each successive question is about to be reached at the conclusion. Nor can any one deny that this is the suitable skill, the judicious custom of the craft.

Some may be inclined to mourn over the old days of systematic arguments and regular discussion. A "field-day" controversy is a fine thing. These skirmishes have much danger and no glory. Yet there is one immense advantage. The appeal now is to the mass of sensible persons. Professed students are not generally suspected of common-sense; and though they often show acuteness in their peculiar pursuits, they have not the various experience, the changing imagination, the feeling nature, the realised detail which are necessary data for a thousand questions. Whatever we may think on this point, however, the transition has been made. The *Edin-*

burgh Review was, at its beginning, a material step in the change. Unquestionably, the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, and such-like writings, had opened a similar vein, but their size was too small. They could only deal with small fragments, or the extreme essence of a subject. They could not give a view of what was complicated, or analyse what was involved. The modern man must be told what to think—shortly, no doubt, but he *must* be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes. The *Edinburgh Review*, which began the system, may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons.

The circumstances of the time were especially favourable to such an undertaking. Those years were the commencement of what is called the Eldonine period. The cold and haughty Pitt had gone down to the grave in circumstances singularly contrasting with his prosperous youth, and he had carried along with him the inner essence of half-liberal principle, which had clung to a tenacious mind from youthful associations, and was all that remained to the Tories of abstraction or theory. As for Lord Eldon, it is the most difficult thing in the world to believe that there ever was such a man. It only shows how intense historical evidence is, that no one really doubts it. He believed in everything which it is impossible to believe in—in the danger of Parliamentary Reform, the danger of Catholic Emancipation, the danger of altering the Court of Chancery, the danger of altering the Courts of Law, the danger of abolishing capital punishment for trivial thefts, the danger of making landowners pay their debts, the danger of making anything more, the danger of making anything less. It seems as if he maturely thought: "Now I know the present state of things to be consistent with the existence of John Lord Eldon; but if we begin altering that state, I am sure I do not know that it will be consistent". As Sir Robert Walpole was against all committees of inquiry on the simple ground, "If they once begin that sort of thing, who knows who will be safe?"—so that great Chancellor (still remembered in his own scene) looked pleasantly down from the woolsack, and seemed to observe : "Well it *is* a queer

thing that I should be here, and here I mean to stay". With this idea he employed, for many years, all the abstract intellect of an accomplished lawyer, all the practical *bonhomie* of an accomplished courtier, all the energy of both professions, all the subtlety acquired in either, in the task of maintaining John Lord Eldon in the Cabinet, and maintaining a Cabinet that would suit John Lord Eldon. No matter what change or misfortunes happened to the Royal house,—whether the most important person in court politics was the old King or the young King, Queen Charlotte or Queen Caroline—whether it was a question of talking grave business to the mutton of George III., or queer stories beside the champagne of George IV., there was the same figure. To the first he was tearfully conscientious, and at the second the old northern circuit stories (how old, what outlasting tradition shall ever say?) told with a cheerful *bonhomie*, and a strong conviction that they *were* ludicrous, really seem to have pleased as well as the more artificial niceties of the professed wits. He was always agreeable and always serviceable. No little peccadillo offended him: the ideal, according to the satirist, of a "good-natured man,"[1] he cared for nothing until he was himself hurt. He ever remembered the statute which absolves obedience to a king *de facto*. And it was the same in the political world. There was one man who never changed. No matter what politicians came and went—and a good many, including several that are now scarcely remembered, did come and go—the "Cabinet-maker," as men called him, still remained. "As to Lord Liverpool being Prime Minister," continued Mr. Brougham, "he is no more Prime Minister than I am. I reckon Lord Liverpool as a sort of member of opposition; and after what has recently passed, if I were required, I should designate him as 'a noble lord with whom I have the honour to act'. Lord Liverpool may have collateral influence, but Lord Eldon has all the direct influence of the Prime Minister. He is Prime Minister to all intents and purposes, and he stands alone in the full exercise of all the influence of that high situation. Lord Liverpool has carried measures against

[1] Hazlitt on Eldon in the "Spirit of the Age".

the Lord Chancellor; so have I. If Lord Liverpool carried the Marriage Act, I carried the Education Bill," etc., etc. And though the general views of Lord Eldon may be described —though one can say at least negatively and intelligibly that he objected to everything proposed, and never proposed anything himself—the arguments are such as it would require great intellectual courage to endeavour at all to explain. What follows is a favourable specimen. "Lord Grey," says his biographer,[1] "having introduced a bill for dispensing with the declarations prescribed by the Acts of 25 and 30 Car. II., against the doctrine of Transubstantiation and the Invocation of Saints, moved the second reading of it on the 10th of June, when the Lord Chancellor again opposed the principle of such a measure, urging that the law which had been introduced under Charles II. had been re-enacted in the first Parliament of *William III.*, the founder of our civil and religious liberties. It had been thought necessary for the preservation of these, that *Papists* should not be allowed to sit in Parliament, and some test was necessary by which it might be ascertained whether a man was a Catholic or Protestant. The only possible test for such a purpose was an oath declaratory of religious belief, and, as *Dr. Paley* had observed, it was perfectly just to have a religious test of a political creed. He entreated the House not to commit the crime against posterity of transmitting to them in an impaired and insecure state the civil and religious liberties of England." And this sort of appeal to Paley and King William is made the ground—one can hardly say the reason—for the most rigid adherence to all that was established.

It may be asked: How came the English people to endure this? They are not naturally illiberal; on the contrary, though slow and cautious, they are prone to steady improvement, and not at all disposed to acquiesce in the unlimited perfection of their rulers. On a certain imaginative side, unquestionably, there is or was a strong feeling of loyalty, of attachment to what is old, love for what is ancestral, belief in what has been tried. But the fond attachment to the past is a very different idea from a slavish adoration of the present. Nothing is more

[1] Twiss.

removed from the Eldonine idolatry of the *status quo* than the old cavalier feeling of deep idolatry for the ancient realm—that half-mystic idea that consecrated what it touched; the moonlight, as it were, which—

> "Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,
> And many an oak that grew thereby.[1]

Why, then, did the English endure the everlasting Chancellor?

The fact is, that Lord Eldon's rule was maintained a great deal on the same motives as that of Louis Napoleon. One can fancy his astonishment at hearing it said, and his cheerful rejoinder: "That whatever he was, and Mr. Brougham was in the habit of calling him strange names, no one should ever make him believe that he was a *Bonaparte*". But, in fact, he was, like the present Emperor, the head of what we call the party of order. Everybody knows what keeps Louis Napoleon in his place. It is not attachment to him, but dread of what he restrains—dread of revolution. The present may not be good, and having such newspapers—you might say no newspapers—is dreadful; but it is better than no trade, bankrupt banks, loss of old savings; your mother beheaded on destructive principles; your eldest son shot on conservative ones. Very similar was the feeling of Englishmen in the year 1800. They had no liking at all for the French system. Statesmen saw its absurdity, holy men were shocked at its impiety, mercantile men saw its effect on the five per cents. Everybody was revolted by its cruelty. That it came across the Channel was no great recommendation. A witty writer of our own time says, that if a still Mussulman, in his flowing robes, wished to give his son a warning against renouncing his faith, he would take the completest, smartest, dapperest French dandy out of the streets of Pera, and say: "There, my son, if ever you come to forget God and the Prophet, you may come to look like *that*". Exactly similar in old conservative speeches is the use of the French Revolution. If you proposed to alter anything, of importance or not of importance, legal or social, religious or

[1] Introduction to "Kenilworth," from Evans's *Old Ballads* (Forrest Morgan).

not religious, the same answer was ready: "You see what the French have come to. They made alterations; if we make alterations, who knows but we may end in the same way?" It was not any peculiar bigotry in Lord Eldon that actuated him, or he would have been powerless; still less was it any affected feeling which he put forward (though, doubtless, he was aware of its persuasive potency, and worked on it most skilfully to his own ends); it was genuine, hearty, craven fear; and he ruled naturally the commonplace Englishman, because he sympathised in his sentiments, and excelled him in his powers.

There was, too, another cause beside fear which then inclined, and which in similar times of miscellaneous revolution will ever incline, subtle rather than creative intellects to a narrow conservatism. Such intellects require an exact creed; they want to be able clearly to distinguish themselves from those around them, to tell to each man where they differ, and why they differ; they cannot make assumptions; they cannot, like the merely practical man, be content with rough and obvious axioms; they require a *theory*. Such a want it is difficult to satisfy in an age of confusion and tumult, when old habits are shaken, old views overthrown, ancient assumptions rudely questioned, ancient inferences utterly denied, when each man has a different view from his neighbour, when an intellectual change has set father and son at variance, when a man's own household are the special foes of his favourite and self-adopted creed. A bold and original mind breaks through these vexations, and forms for itself a theory satisfactory to its notions, and sufficient for its wants. A weak mind yields a passive obedience to those among whom it is thrown. But a mind which is searching without being creative, which is accurate and logical enough to see defects, without being combinative or inventive enough to provide remedies—which, in the old language, is discriminative rather than discursive—is wholly unable, out of the medley of new suggestions, to provide itself with an adequate belief; and it naturally falls back on the *status quo*. This is, at least, clear and simple and defined; you know at any rate what you propose—where you end—why you pause;—an argumentative defence it is, doubtless, difficult

to find; but there are arguments on all sides; the world is a medley of arguments; no one is agreed in which direction to alter the world; what is proposed is as liable to objection as what exists; nonsense for nonsense, the old should keep its ground: and so in times of convulsion, the philosophic scepticism—the ever-questioning hesitation of Hume and Montaigne—the subtlest quintessence of the most restless and refining abstraction—becomes allied to the stupidest, crudest acquiescence in the present and concrete world. We read occasionally in conservative literature (the remark is as true of religion as of politics) alternations of sentences, the first an appeal to the coarsest prejudice,—the next a subtle hint to a craving and insatiable scepticism. You may trace this even in Vesey junior. Lord Eldon never read Hume or Montaigne, but sometimes, in the interstices of cumbrous law, you may find sentences with their meaning, if not in their manner; "Dumpor's case always struck me as extraordinary; but if you depart from Dumpor's case, what is there to prevent a departure in every direction?"

The glory of the *Edinburgh Review* is that from the first it steadily set itself to oppose this timorous acquiescence in the actual system. On domestic subjects the history of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century is a species of duel between the *Edinburgh Review* and Lord Eldon. All the ancient abuses which he thought it most dangerous to impair, they thought it most dangerous to retain. "To appreciate the value of the *Edinburgh Review*," says one of the founders,[1] "the state of England at the period when that journal began should be had in remembrance. The Catholics were not emancipated. The Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed. The game-laws were horribly oppressive; steel-traps and spring-guns were set all over the country; prisoners tried for their lives could have no counsel. Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily on mankind. Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments. The principles of political economy were little understood. The laws of debt and conspiracy were on the worst footing. The enormous wicked-

[1] Sydney Smith.

ness of the slave-trade was tolerated. A thousand evils were in existence which the talents of good and noble men have since lessened or removed: and these efforts have been not a little assisted by the honest boldness of the *Edinburgh Review.*" And even more characteristic than the advocacy of these or any other partial or particular reforms is the systematic opposition of the *Edinburgh Review* to the crude acquiescence in the *status quo;* the timorous dislike to change because it was change; to the optimistic conclusion, "that what is, ought to be"; the sceptical query: "How do you know that what you say will be any better?"

In this defence of the principle of innovation, a defence which it requires great imagination (or, as we suggested, the looking across the Channel) to conceive the efficacy of now, the *Edinburgh Review* was but the doctrinal organ of the Whigs. A great deal of philosophy has been expended in endeavouring to fix and express theoretically the creed of that party: various forms of abstract doctrine have been drawn out, in which elaborate sentence follows hard on elaborate sentence, to be set aside, or at least vigorously questioned by the next or succeeding inquirers. In truth Whiggism is not a creed, it is a character. Perhaps as long as there has been a political history in this country there have been certain men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy scepticism; with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved.

These are the Whigs. A tinge of simplicity still clings to the character; of old it was the Country Party. The limitation of their imagination is in some sort an advantage to such men; it confines them to a simple path, prevents their being drawn aside by various speculations, restricts them to what is clear and intelligible, and at hand. "I cannot," said Sir S. Romilly, "be convinced without arguments, and I do not see that either Burke or Paine advance any." He was

unable to see that the most convincing arguments—and some of those in the work of Burke which he alludes to,[1] are certainly sound enough—may be expressed imaginatively, and may work a far firmer persuasion than any neat and abstract statement. Nor are the intellectual powers of the characteristic element in this party exactly of the loftiest order; they have no call to make great discoveries, or pursue unbounded designs, or amaze the world by some wild dream of empire and renown. That terrible essence of daring genius, such as we see it in Napoleon, and can imagine it in some of the conquerors of old time, is utterly removed from their cool and placid judgment. In taste they are correct,—that is, better appreciating the complete compliance with explicit and ascertained rules, than the unconscious exuberance of inexplicable and unforeseen beauties. In their own writings, they display the defined neatness of the second order, rather than the aspiring hardihood of the first excellence. In action they are quiet and reasonable rather than inventive and overwhelming. Their power, indeed, is scarcely intellectual; on the contrary, it resides in what Aristotle would have called their ἦθος, and we should call their nature. They are emphatically pure-natured and firm-natured. Instinctively casting aside the coarse temptations and crude excitements of a vulgar earth, they pass like a September breeze across the other air, cool and refreshing, unable, one might fancy, even to comprehend the many offences with which all else is fainting and oppressed. So far even as their excellence is intellectual, it consists less in the supereminent possession of any single talent or endowment, than in the simultaneous enjoyment and felicitous adjustment of many or several;—in a certain balance of the faculties which we call judgment or sense, which placidly indicates to them what should be done, and which is not preserved without an equable calm, and a patient, persistent watchfulness. In such men the moral and intellectual nature half become one. Whether, according to the Greek question, manly virtue can be taught or not, assuredly it has never been taught to them; it seems a native endowment; it seems a

[1] *Reflections upon the Revolution in France.*

soul—a soul of honour—as we speak, within the exterior soul; a fine impalpable essence, more exquisite than the rest of the being; as the thin pillar of the cloud, more beautiful than the other blue of heaven, governing and guiding a simple way through the dark wilderness of our world.

To descend from such elevations, among *people* Sir Samuel Romilly is the best-known type of this character. The admirable biography of him made public his admirable virtues. Yet it is probable that among the aristocratic Whigs, persons as typical of the character can be found. This species of noble nature is exactly of the kind which hereditary associations tend to purify and confirm; just that casual, delicate, placid virtue, which it is so hard to find, perhaps so sanguine to expect, in a rough tribune of the people. Defects enough there are in this character, on which we shall say something; yet it is wonderful to see what an influence in this sublunary sphere it gains and preserves. The world makes an oracle of its judgment. There is a curious living instance of this. You may observe that when an ancient liberal, Lord John Russell, or any of the essential sect, has done anything very queer, the last thing you would imagine anybody would dream of doing, and is attacked for it, he always answers boldly, "Lord Lansdowne said I *might*"; or if it is a ponderous day, the eloquence runs, "A noble friend with whom I have ever had the inestimable advantage of being associated from the commencement (the infantile period, I might say) of my political life, and to whose advice," etc., etc., etc.—and a very cheerful existence it must be for "my noble friend" to be expected to justify—(for they never say it except they have done something very odd)—and dignify every aberration. Still it must be a beautiful feeling to have a man like Lord John, to have a stiff, small man bowing down before you. And a good judge[1] certainly suggested the conferring of this authority. "Why do they not talk over the virtues and excellences of Lansdowne? There is no man who performs the duties of life better, or fills a high station in a more becoming manner. He is full of knowledge, and eager for its acquisition. His remarkable politeness is the result of

[1] Sydney Smith.

good nature, regulated by good sense. He looks for talents and qualities among all ranks of men, and adds them to his stock of society, as a botanist does his plants; and while other aristocrats are yawning among stars and garters, Lansdowne is refreshing his soul with the fancy and genius which he has found in odd places, and gathered to the marbles and pictures of his palace. Then he is an honest politician, a wise statesman, and has a philosophic mind," etc., etc.[1] Here is devotion for a carping critic; and who ever heard before of *bonhomie* in an idol?

It may strike some that this equable kind of character is not the most interesting. Many will prefer the bold felicities of daring genius, the deep plans of latent and searching sagacity, the hardy triumphs of an overawing and imperious will. Yet it is not unremarkable that an experienced and erudite Frenchman, not unalive to artistic effect, has just now selected this very species of character for the main figure in a large portion of an elaborate work. The hero of M. Villemain is one to whom he delights to ascribe such things as *bon sens, esprit juste, cœur excellent.* The result, it may be owned, is a little dull, yet it is not the less characteristic. The instructed observer has detected the deficiency of his country. If France had more men of firm will, quiet composure, with a suspicion of enormous principle and a taste for moderate improvement: if a Whig party, in a word, were possible in France, France would be free. And though there are doubtless crises in affairs, dark and terrible moments, when a more creative intellect is needful to propose, a more dictatorial will is necessary to carry out, a sudden and daring resolution; though in times of inextricable confusion—perhaps the present is one of them[2]—a more abstruse and disentangling intellect is required to untwist the ravelled perplexities of a complicated world; yet England will cease to be the England of our fathers, when a large share in great affairs is no longer given to the equable sense, the composed resolution, the homely purity of the characteristic Whigs.

It is evident that between such men and Lord Eldon there

[1] Sydney Smith, Letter to John Murray, June 4, 1843; "Memoir," vol. ii.

[2] This was published in October, 1855.

could be no peace; and between them and the *Edinburgh Review* there was a natural alliance. Not only the kind of reforms there proposed, the species of views therein maintained, but the very manner in which those views and alterations are put forward and maintained, is just what they would like. The kind of writing suitable to such minds is not the elaborate, ambitious, exhaustive discussion of former ages, but the clear, simple, occasional writing (as we just now described it) of the present times. The opinions to be expressed are short and simple; the innovations suggested are natural and evident; neither one nor the other require more than an intelligible statement, a distinct exposition to the world; and their reception would be only impeded and complicated by operose and cumbrous argumentation. The exact mind which of all others dislikes the stupid adherence to the *status quo*, is the keen, quiet, improving Whig mind; the exact kind of writing most adapted to express that dislike is the cool, pungent, didactic essay.

Equally common to the Whigs and the *Edinburgh Review* is the enmity to the sceptical, over-refining Toryism of Hume and Montaigne. The Whigs, it is true, have a conservatism of their own, but it instinctively clings to certain practical rules tried by steady adherence, to appropriate formulæ verified by the regular application and steady success of many ages. Political philosophers speak of it as a great step when the idea of an attachment to an organised code and system of rules and laws takes the place of the exclusive oriental attachment to the person of the single monarch. This step is natural, is instinctive to the Whig mind; that cool impassive intelligence is little likely to yield to ardent emotions of personal loyalty; but its chosen ideal is a body or collection of wise rules fitly applicable to great affairs, pleasing a placid sense by an evident propriety, gratifying the capacity for business by a constant and clear applicability. The Whigs are constitutional by instinct, as the Cavaliers were monarchical by devotion. It has been a jest at their present leader[1] that he is over familiar with public forms and parliamentary rites. The first wish of the Whigs is to retain the constitution; the second—and it is of almost equal

[1] Lord Palmerston.

strength—is to improve it. They think the body of laws now existing to be, in the main and in its essence, excellent; but yet that there are exceptional defects which should be remedied, superficial inconsistencies that should be corrected. The most opposite creed is that of the sceptic, who teaches that you are to keep what is because it exists; not from a conviction of its excellence, but from an uncertainty that anything better can be obtained. The one is an attachment to precise rules for specific reasons; the other an acquiescence in the present on grounds that would be equally applicable to its very opposite, from a disbelief in the possibility of improvement, and a conviction of the uncertainty of all things. And equally adverse to an unlimited scepticism is the nature of popular writing. It is true that the greatest teachers of that creed have sometimes, and as it were of set purpose, adopted that species of writing; yet essentially it is inimical to them. Its appeal is to the people; as has been shown, it addresses the *élite* of common men, sensible in their affairs, intelligent in their tastes, influential among their neighbours. What is absolute scepticism to such men?—a dream, a chimera, an inexplicable absurdity. Tell it to them to-day, and they will have forgotten it to-morrow. A man of business hates elaborate trifling. "If you do not believe *your own* senses," he will say, "there is no use in *my* talking to you." As to the multiplicity of arguments and the complexity of questions, he feels them little. He has a plain, simple, as he would say, practical way of looking at the matter; and you will never make him comprehend any other. He knows the world *can* be improved. And thus what we may call the middle species of writing—which is intermediate between the light, frivolous style of merely amusing literature, and the heavy, conscientious elaborateness of methodical philosophy—the style of the original *Edinburgh*—is, in truth, as opposed to the vague, desponding conservatism of the sceptic as it is to the stupid conservatism of the crude and uninstructed; and substantially for the same reason—that it is addressed to men of cool, clear, and practical understandings.

It is, indeed, no wonder that the *Edinburgh Review* should be agreeable to the Whigs, for the people who founded it were

Whigs. Among these, three stand pre-eminent—Horner, Jeffrey, and Sydney Smith. Other men of equal ability may have contributed—and a few did contribute—to its pages; but these men were, more than any one else, the first *Edinburgh Review*.

Francis Horner's was a short and singular life. He was the son of an Edinburgh shopkeeper. He died at thirty-nine; and when he died, from all sides of the usually cold House of Commons great statesmen and thorough gentlemen got up to deplore his loss. Tears are rarely parliamentary: all men are arid towards young Scotchmen; yet it was one of that inclement nation whom statesmen of the species Castlereagh, and statesmen of the species Whitbread—with all the many kinds and species that lie between the two—rose in succession to lament. The fortunes and superficial aspect of the man make it more singular. He had no wealth, was a briefless barrister, never held an office, was a conspicuous member of the most unpopular of all oppositions—the opposition to a glorious and successful war. He never had the means of obliging any one. He was destitute of showy abilities: he had not the intense eloquence or overwhelming ardour which enthral and captivate popular assemblies: his powers of administration were little tried, and may possibly be slightly questioned. In his youthful reading he was remarkable for laying down, for a few months of study, enormous plans, such as many years would scarcely complete; and not especially remarkable for doing anything wonderful towards accomplishing those plans. Sir Walter Scott, who, though not illiberal in his essential intellect, was a keen partisan on superficial matters, and no lenient critic on actual Edinburgh Whigs, used to observe: "I cannot admire your Horner; he always reminds me of Obadiah's bull, who, though he never certainly did produce a calf, nevertheless went about his business with so much gravity, that he commanded the respect of the whole parish".[1] It is no explanation of the universal regret, that he was a considerable political economist: no real English gentleman, in his secret soul, was ever sorry for the death of a political

[1] See last chapter of "Tristram Shandy".

economist: he is much more likely to be sorry for his life. There is an idea that he has something to do with statistics; or, if that be exploded, that he is a person who writes upon "value": says that rent is—you cannot very well make out what; talks excruciating currency; he may be useful as drying machines are useful;[1] but the notion of crying about him is absurd. The economical loss might be great, but it will not explain the mourning for Francis Horner.

The fact is that Horner is a striking example of the advantage of keeping an atmosphere. This may sound like nonsense, and yet it is true. There is around some men a kind of circle or halo of influences, and traits, and associations, by which they infallibly leave a distinct and uniform impression on all their contemporaries. It is very difficult, even for those who have the best opportunities, to analyse exactly what this impression consists in, or why it was made—but it *is* made. There is a certain undefinable keeping in the traits and manner, and common speech and characteristic actions of some men, which inevitably stamps the same mark and image. It is like a man's style. There are some writers who can be known by a few words of their writing; each syllable is instinct with a certain spirit: put it into the hands of any one chosen at random, the same impression will be produced by the same casual and felicitous means. Just so in character, the air and atmosphere, so to speak, which are around a man, have a delicate and expressive power, and leave a stamp of unity on the interpretative faculty of mankind. Death dissolves this association, and it becomes a problem for posterity what it was that contemporaries observed and reverenced. There is Lord Somers. Does any one know why he had such a reputation? He was Lord Chancellor, and decided a Bank case, and had an influence in the Cabinet; but there have been Lord Chancellors, and Bank cases, and influential Cabinet ministers not a few, that have never attained to a like reputa-

[1] "Horner is ill. He was desired to read amusing books: upon searching his library, it appeared he had no amusing books; the nearest approach to a work of that description being the *Indian Trader's Complete Guide*."—*Sydney Smith's Letter to Lady Holland.*

tion. There is little we can connect specifically with his name. Lord Macaulay, indeed, says that he spoke for five minutes on the Bishops' trial; and that when he sat down, his reputation as an orator and constitutional lawyer was established. But this must be a trifle eloquent; hardly any orator could be fast enough to attain such a reputation in five minutes. The truth is, that Lord Somers had around him that inexpressible attraction and influence of which we speak. He left a sure, and if we may trust the historian, even a momentary impression on those who saw him. By a species of tact they felt him to be a great man. The ethical sense —for there is almost such a thing in simple persons—discriminated the fine and placid oneness of his nature. It was the same on a smaller scale with Horner. After he had left Edinburgh several years, his closest and most confidential associate writes to him: "There is no circumstance in your life, my dear Horner, so enviable as the universal confidence which your conduct has produced among all descriptions of men. I do not speak of your friends, who have been near and close observers; but I have had some occasions of observing the impression which those who are distant spectators have had, and I believe there are few instances of any person of your age possessing the same character for independence and integrity, qualities for which very little credit is given in general to young men."[1] Sydney Smith said, "the Ten Commandments were written on his countenance". Of course he was a very ugly man, but the moral impression in fact conveyed was equally efficacious. "I have often," said the same most just observer, "told him, that there was not a crime he might not commit with impunity, as no judge or jury who saw him would give the smallest credit to any evidence against him. There was in his look a calm settled love of all that was honourable and good—an air of wisdom and of sweetness. You saw at once that he was a great man, whom Nature had intended for a leader of human beings; you ranged yourself willingly under his banners, and cheerfully submitted to his sway." From the somewhat lengthened

[1] Letter from Lord Murray.

description of what we defined as the essential Whig character, it is evident how agreeable and suitable such a man was to their quiet, composed, and aristocratic nature. His tone was agreeable to English gentlemen: a firm and placid manliness, without effort or pretension, is what they like best; and therefore it was that the House of Commons grieved for his loss—unanimously and without distinction.

Some friends of Horner's, in his own time, mildly criticised him for a tendency to party spirit. The disease in him, if real, was by no means virulent; but it is worth noticing as one of the defects to which the proper Whig character is specially prone. It is evident in the quiet agreement of the men. Their composed, unimaginative nature is inclined to isolate itself in a single view; their placid disposition, never prone to self-distrust, is rather susceptible of friendly influence; their practical habit is concentrated on what should be done. They do not wish—they do not like to go forth into various speculation; to put themselves in the position of opponents; to weigh in a refining scale the special weight of small objections. Their fancy is hardly vivid enough to explain to them all the characters of those whom they oppose; their intellect scarcely detective enough to discover a meaning for each grain in opposing arguments. Nor is their temper, it may be, always prone to be patient with propositions which tease, and persons who resist them. The wish to call down fire from heaven is rarely absent in pure zeal for a pure cause.

A good deal of praise has naturally been bestowed upon the Whigs for adopting such a man as Horner, with Romilly and others of that time; and much excellent eulogy has been expended on the close boroughs, which afforded to the Whig leaders a useful mode of showing their favour. Certainly, the character of Horner was one altogether calculated to ingratiate itself with the best and most special Whig nature. But as for the eulogy on the proprietary seats in Parliament, it is certain that from the position of the Whig party, the nomination system was then most likely to show its excellences, and to conceal its defects. Nobody but an honest man would bind himself thoroughly to the Whigs. It was evident that the

reign of Lord Eldon must be long; the heavy and common Englishman (after all, the most steady and powerful force in our political constitution) had been told that Lord Grey was in favour of the "Papists," and liked Bonaparte; and the consequence was a long, painful, arduous exile on "the other side of the table,"—the last place any political adventurer would wish to arrive at. Those who have no bribes will never charm the corrupt; those who have nothing to give will not please those who desire that much shall be given them. There is an observation of Niel Blane, the innkeeper, in *Old Mortality*. "'And what are we to eat ourselves, then, father,' asked Jenny, 'when we hae sent awa the haile meal in the ark and the girnel?' 'We maun gaur wheat flour serve us for a blink,' said Niel, with an air of resignation. 'It is not that ill food, though far frae being sae hearty and kindly to a Scotchman's stomach as the curney aitmeal is: the Englishers live amaist upon it,'" etc. It was so with the Whigs; they were obliged to put up with honest and virtuous men, and they wanted able men to carry on a keen opposition; and, after all, they and the "Englishers" like such men best.

In another point of view, too, Horner's life was characteristic of those times. It might seem, at first sight, odd that the English Whigs should go to Scotland to find a literary representative. There was no place where Toryism was so intense. The constitution of Scotland at that time has been described as the worst constitution in Europe. The nature of the representation made the entire country a Government borough. In the towns, the franchise belonged to a close and self-electing corporation, who were always carefully watched: the county representation, anciently resting on a property qualification, had become vested in a few titular freeholders, something like lords of the manor, only that they might have no manor; and these, even with the addition of the borough freeholders, did not amount to three thousand. The whole were in the hands of Lord Eldon's party, and the entire force, influence, and patronage of Government were spent to maintain and keep it so. By inevitable consequence, Liberalism, even of the most moderate kind, was thought almost a criminal offence. The mild Horner was con-

sidered a man of "very violent opinions".[1] Jeffrey's father, a careful and discerning parent, was so anxious to shield him from the intellectual taint, as to forbid his attendance at Stewart's lectures. This seems an odd place to find the eruption of a liberal review. Of course the necessary effect of a close and commonplace tyranny was to engender a strong reaction in searching and vigorous minds. The Liberals of the North, though far fewer, may perhaps have been stronger Liberals than those of the South; but this will hardly explain the phenomenon. The reason is an academical one; the teaching of Scotland seems to have been designed to teach men to write essays and articles. There are two kinds of education, into all the details of which it is not now pleasant to go, but which may be adequately described as the education of facts, and the education of speculation. The system of facts is the English system. The strength of the pedagogue and the agony of the pupil are designed to engender a good knowledge of two languages; in the old times, a little arithmetic; now, also a knowledge, more or less, of mathematics and mathematical physics. The positive tastes and tendencies of the English mind confine its training to ascertained learning and definite science. In Scotland the case has long been different. The time of a man like Horner was taken up with speculations like these: "I have long been feeding my ambition with the prospect of accomplishing, at some future period of my life, a work similar to that which Sir Francis Bacon executed, about two hundred years ago. It will depend on the sweep and turn of my speculations, whether they shall be thrown into the form of a discursive commentary on the *Instauratio Magna* of that great author, or shall be entitled to an original form, under the title of a 'View of the Limits of Human Knowledge and a System of the Principles of Philosophical Inquiry'. I shall say nothing at present of the audacity," etc., etc. And this sort of planning, which is the staple of his youthful biography, was really accompanied by much application to metaphysics, history, political economy, and such like studies. It is not at all to our present purpose to compare this speculative and indeterminate kind of

[1] Lady Holland: *Memoirs of Sydney Smith.*

study with the rigorous accurate education of England. The fault of the former is sometimes to produce a sort of lecturer *in vacuo*, ignorant of exact pursuits, and diffusive of vague words. The English now and then produce a learned creature like a thistle, prickly with all facts, and incapable of all fruit. But, passing by this general question, it cannot be doubted that, as a preparation for the writing of various articles, the system of Edinburgh is enormously superior to that of Cambridge. The particular, compact, exclusive learning of England is inferior in this respect to the general, diversified, omnipresent information of the North; and what is more, the speculative, dubious nature of metaphysical and such like pursuits tends, in a really strong mind, to cultivate habits of independent thought and original discussion. A bold mind so trained will even *wish* to advance its peculiar ideas, on its own account, in a written and special form; that is, as we said, to write an article. Such are the excellences in this respect of the system of which Horner is an example. The defects tend the same way. It tends, as is said, to make a man fancy he knows everything. "Well then, at least," it may be answered, "I can write an article on everything."

The facility and boldness of the habits so produced were curiously exemplified in Lord Jeffrey. During the first six years of the *Edinburgh Review* he wrote as many as seventy-nine articles; in a like period afterwards he wrote forty. Any one who should expect to find a pure perfection in these miscellaneous productions, should remember their bulk. If all his reviews were reprinted, they would be very many. And all the while, he was a busy lawyer, was editor of the *Review*, did the business, corrected the proof-sheets; and more than all, what one would have thought a very strong man's work, actually managed Henry Brougham. You must not criticise papers like these, rapidly written in the hurry of life, as you would the painful words of an elaborate sage, slowly and with anxious awfulness instructing mankind. Some things, a few things, are for eternity; some, and a good many, are for time. We do not expect the everlastingness of the Pyramids from the vibratory grandeur of a Tyburnian mansion.

The truth is, that Lord Jeffrey was something of a Whig critic. We have hinted, that among the peculiarities of that character, an excessive partiality for new, arduous, overwhelming, original excellence, was by no means to be numbered. Their tendency inclining to the quiet footsteps of custom, they like to trace the exact fulfilment of admitted rules, a just accordance with the familiar features of ancient merit. But they are most averse to mysticism. A clear, precise, discriminating intellect shrinks at once from the symbolic, the unbounded, the indefinite. The misfortune is that mysticism is true. There certainly are kinds of truths, borne in as it were instinctively on the human intellect, most influential on the character and the heart, yet hardly capable of stringent statement, difficult to limit by an elaborate definition. Their course is shadowy; the mind seems rather to have seen than to see them, more to feel after than definitely apprehend them. They commonly involve an infinite element, which of course cannot be stated precisely, or else a first principle—an original tendency—of our intellectual constitution, which it is impossible not to feel, and yet which it is hard to extricate in terms and words. Of this latter kind is what has been called the religion of Nature, or more exactly perhaps, the religion of the imagination. This is an interpretation of the world. According to it the beauty of the universe has a meaning, its grandeur a soul, its sublimity an expression. As we gaze on the faces of those whom we love; as we watch the light of life in the dawning of their eyes, and the play of their features, and the wildness of their animation; as we trace in changing lineaments a varying sign; as a charm and a thrill seem to run along the tone of a voice, to haunt the mind with a mere word; as a tone seems to roam in the ear; as a trembling fancy hears words that are unspoken; so in Nature the mystical sense finds a motion in the mountain, and a power in the waves, and a meaning in the long white line of the shore, and a thought in the blue of heaven, and a gushing soul in the buoyant light, an unbounded being in the vast void of air, and

"Wakeful watchings in the pointed stars".

There is a philosophy in this which might be explained, if explaining were to our purpose. It might be advanced that there are original sources of expression in the essential grandeur and sublimity of Nature, of an analogous though fainter kind, to those familiar, inexplicable signs by which we trace in the very face and outward lineaments of man the existence and working of the mind within. But be this as it may, it is certain that Mr. Wordsworth preached this kind of religion, and that Lord Jeffrey did not believe a word of it. His cool, sharp, collected mind revolted from its mysticism; his detective intelligence was absorbed in its apparent fallaciousness; his light humour made sport with the sublimities of the preacher. His love of perspicuity was vexed by its indefiniteness; the precise philosopher was amazed at its mystic unintelligibility. Finding a little fault was doubtless not unpleasant to him. The reviewer's pen—*φόνος ἡρώεσσιν*—has seldom been more poignantly wielded. "If," he was told, "you could be alarmed into the semblance of modesty, you would charm everybody; but remember my joke against you" (Sydney Smith *loquitur*) "about the moon. D—n the solar system—bad light—planets too distant—pestered with comets: feeble contrivance; could make a better with great ease." Yet we do not mean that in this great literary feud, either of the combatants had all the right, or gained all the victory. The world has given judgment. Both Mr. Wordsworth and Lord Jeffrey have received their reward. The one had his own generation; the laughter of men, the applause of drawing-rooms, the concurrence of the crowd: the other a succeeding age, the fond enthusiasm of secret students, the lonely rapture of lonely minds. And each has received according to his kind. If all cultivated men speak differently because of the existence of Wordsworth and Coleridge; if not a thoughtful English book has appeared for forty years, without some trace for good or evil of their influence; if sermon-writers subsist upon their thoughts; if "sacred poets" thrive by translating their weaker portion into the speech of women; if, when all this is over, some sufficient part of their writing will ever be fitting food for wild musing and solitary medita-

tion, surely this is because they possessed the inner nature—"an intense and glowing mind," "the vision and the faculty divine".[1] But if, perchance, in their weaker moments, the great authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* did ever imagine that the world was to pause because of their verses: that "Peter Bell" would be popular in drawing-rooms; that "Christabel" would be perused in the City; that people of fashion would make a handbook of the "Excursion,"—it was well for them to be told at once that this was not so. Nature ingeniously prepared a shrill artificial voice, which spoke in season and out of season, enough and more than enough, what will ever be the idea of the cities of the plain concerning those who live alone among the mountains; of the frivolous concerning the grave; of the gregarious concerning the recluse; of those who laugh concerning those who laugh not; of the common concerning the uncommon; of those who lend on usury concerning those who lend not; the notion of the world of those whom it will not reckon among the righteous—it said,[2] "This won't do!" And so in all time will the lovers of polished Liberalism speak, concerning the intense and lonely prophet.

Yet, if Lord Jeffrey had the natural infirmities of a Whig critic, he certainly had also its extrinsic and political advantages. Especially at Edinburgh the Whigs wanted a literary man. The Liberal party in Scotland had long groaned under political exclusion; they had suffered, with acute mortification, the heavy sway of Henry Dundas, but they had been compensated by a literary supremacy; in the book-world they enjoyed a domination. On a sudden this was rudely threatened. The fame of Sir Walter Scott was echoed from the southern world and appealed to every national sentiment—to the inmost heart of every Scotchman. And what a ruler! a lame Tory, a jocose Jacobite, a laugher at Liberalism, a scoffer at metaphysics, an unbeliever in political economy! What a Gothic ruler for the modern Athens;—was this man to reign over them? It would not have been like human

[1] Wordsworth's "Excursion".

[2] The first words of Jeffrey's review of the "Excursion" are: "This will never do".

nature, if a strong and intellectual party had not soon found a clever and noticeable rival. Poets, indeed, are not made "to order"; but Byron, speaking the sentiment of his time and circle, counted reviewers their equals. If a Tory produced "Marmion," a Whig wrote the best article upon it; Scott might, so ran Liberal speech, be the best living writer of fiction; Jeffrey, clearly, was the most shrewd and accomplished of literary critics.

And though this was an absurd delusion, Lord Jeffrey was no everyday man. He invented the trade of editorship. Before him an editor was a bookseller's drudge; he is now a distinguished functionary. If Jeffrey was not a great critic, he had, what very great critics have wanted, the art of writing what most people would think good criticism. He might not know his subject, but he knew his readers. People like to read ideas which they can imagine to have been their own. "Why does Scarlett always persuade the jury?" asked a rustic gentleman. "Because there are twelve Scarletts in the jury-box," replied an envious advocate. What Scarlett was in law, Jeffrey was in criticism; he could become that which his readers could not avoid being. He was neither a pathetic writer nor a profound writer; but he was a quick-eyed, bustling, black-haired, sagacious, agreeable man of the world. He had his day, and was entitled to his day; but a gentle oblivion must now cover his already subsiding reputation.

Sydney Smith was an after-dinner writer. His words have a flow, a vigour, an expression, which is not given to hungry mortals. You seem to read of good wine, of good cheer, of beaming and buoyant enjoyment. There is little trace of labour in his composition; it is poured forth like an unceasing torrent, rejoicing daily to run its course. And what courage there is in it! There is as much variety of pluck in writing across a sheet, as in riding across a country. Cautious men have many adverbs, "usually," "nearly," "almost": safe men begin, "it may be advanced": you never know precisely what their premises are, nor what their conclusion is; they go tremulously like a timid rider; they turn hither and thither; they do not go straight across a subject, like a

masterly mind. A few sentences are enough for a master of sentences. A practical topic wants rough vigour and strong exposition. This is the writing of Sydney Smith. It is suited to the broader kind of important questions. For anything requiring fine nicety of speculation, long elaborateness of deduction, evanescent sharpness of distinction, neither his style nor his mind was fit. He had no patience for long argument, no acuteness for delicate precision, no fangs for recondite research. Writers, like teeth, are divided into incisors and grinders. Sydney Smith was a "molar". He did not run a long sharp argument into the interior of a question; he did not, in the common phrase, go deeply into it; but he kept it steadily under the contact of a strong, capable, heavy, jaw-like understanding,—pressing its surface, effacing its intricacies, grinding it down. Yet, as we said, this is done without toil. The play of the "molar" is instinctive and placid; he could not help it; it would seem that he had an enjoyment in it.

The story is, that he liked a bright light; that when he was a poor parson in the country, he used, not being able to afford more delicate luminaries, to adorn his drawing-room with a hundred little lamps of tin metal and mutton fat. When you know this, you see it in all his writings. There is the same preference of perspicuity throughout them. Elegance, fine savour, sweet illustration, are quite secondary. His only question to an argument was, "Will it tell?" as to an example, "Will it exemplify?" Like what is called "push" in a practical man, his style goes straight to its object; it is not restrained by the gentle hindrances, the delicate decorums of refining natures. There is nothing more characteristic of the Scandinavian mythology, than that it had a god with a hammer. You have no better illustration of our English humour, than the great success of this huge and healthy organisation.

There is something about this not exactly to the Whig taste. They do not like such broad fun, and rather dislike unlimited statement. Lord Melbourne, it is plain, declined to make him a bishop. In this there might be a vestige of Canningite prejudice, but on the whole, there was the dis-

tinction between the two men which there is between the loud wit and the *recherché* thinker—between the bold controversialist and the discriminative statesman. A refined *noblesse* can hardly respect a humorist; he amuses them, and they like him, but they are puzzled to know whether he does not laugh at them as well as with them; and the notion of being laughed at, ever, or on any score, is alien to their shy decorum and suppressed pride. But in a broader point of view, and taking a wider range of general character, there was a good deal in common. More than any one else, Sydney Smith was Liberalism in life. Somebody has defined Liberalism as the spirit of the world. It represents its genial enjoyment, its wise sense, its steady judgment, its preference of the near to the far, of the seen to the unseen; it represents, too, its shrinking from difficult dogma, from stern statement, from imperious superstition. What health is to the animal, Liberalism is to the polity. It is a principle of fermenting enjoyment, running over all the nerves, inspiring the frame, happy in its mind, easy in its place, glad to behold the sun. All this Sydney Smith, as it were, personified. The biography just published of him will be very serviceable to his fame. He has been regarded too much as a fashionable jester, and metropolitan wit of society. We have now for the first time a description of him as he was,—equally at home in the crude world of Yorkshire, and amid the quintessential refinements of Mayfair. It is impossible to believe that he did not give the epithet to his parish: it is now called Foston *le Clay*. It was a "mute inglorious" Sydney of the district, that invented the name, if it is really older than the century. The place has an obtuse soil, inhabited by stiff-clayed Yorkshiremen. There was nobody in the parish to speak to, only peasants, farmers, and such like (what the clergy call "parishioners") and an old clerk who thought every one who came from London a fool, "but you I do zee, Mr. Smith, be no fool". This was the sort of life.

"I turned schoolmaster, to educate my son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs. Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer, as I could not

let my land. A man-servant was too expensive; so I caught up a little garden-girl, made like a mile-stone, christened her Bunch, put a napkin in her hand, and made her my butler. The girls taught her to read, Mrs. Sydney to wait, and I undertook her morals. Bunch became the best butler in the county.

"I had little furniture, so I bought a cart-load of deals; took a carpenter (who came to me for parish relief, called Jack Robinson) with a face like a full-moon, into my service; established him in a barn, and said: 'Jack, furnish my house'. You see the result!

"At last it was suggested that a carriage was much wanted in the establishment. After diligent search, I discovered in the back settlements of a York coach-maker an ancient green chariot, supposed to have been the earliest invention of the kind. I brought it home in triumph to my admiring family. Being somewhat dilapidated, the village tailor lined it, the village blacksmith repaired it; nay (but for Mrs. Sydney's earnest entreaties), we believe the village painter would have exercised his genius upon the exterior; it escaped this danger however, and the result was wonderful. Each year added to its charms: it grew younger and younger; a new wheel, a new spring; I christened it the *Immortal;* it was known all over the neighbourhood; the village boys cheered it, and the village dogs barked at it; but 'Faber meæ fortunæ' was my motto, and we had no false shame.

"Added to all these domestic cares, I was village parson, village doctor, village comforter, village magistrate, and Edinburgh Reviewer; so you see I had not much time left on my hands to regret London."

It is impossible that this should not at once remind us of the life of Sir Walter Scott. There is the same strong sense, the same glowing, natural pleasure, the same power of dealing with men, the same power of diffusing common happiness. Both enjoyed as much in a day, as an ordinary man in a month. The term "animal spirits" peculiarly expresses this bold enjoyment; it seems to come from a principle intermediate between the mind and the body; to be hardly intellectual enough for the soul, and yet too permeating and aspiring for crude matter. Of course, there is an immense imaginative world in Scott's existence to which Sydney Smith had no claim. But they met upon the present world; they enjoyed the spirit of life; "they loved the world, and the world them;" they did not pain themselves with immaterial speculation—roast beef was an admitted fact. A certain, even excessive practical caution which is ascribed to the Englishman, Scott would have been the better for. Yet his biography would have been

the worse. There is nothing in the life before us comparable in interest to the tragic, gradual cracking of the great mind; the overtasking of the great capital, and the ensuing failure; the spectacle of heaving genius breaking in the contact with misfortune. The anticipation of this pain increases the pleasure of the reader; the commencing threads of coming calamity shade the woof of pleasure; the proximity of suffering softens the ὕβρις, the terrible, fatiguing energy of enjoyment.

A great deal of excellent research has been spent on the difference between "humour" and "wit," into which metaphysical problem "our limits," of course, forbid us to enter. There is, however, between them, the distinction of dry sticks and green sticks; there is in humour a living energy, a diffused potency, a noble sap; it grows upon the character of the humorist. Wit is part of the machinery of the intellect; as Madame de Staël says, "*La gaieté de l'esprit est facile à tous les hommes d'esprit*". We wonder Mr. Babbage does not invent a punning-engine; it is just as possible as a calculating one. Sydney Smith's mirth was essentially humorous; it clings to the character of the man; as with the sayings of Dr. Johnson, there is a species of personality attaching to it; the word is more graphic because Sydney Smith—that man being the man that he was—said it, than it would have been if said by any one else. In a desponding moment, he would have it he was none the better for the jests which he made, any more than a bottle for the wine which passed through it: this is a true description of many a wit, but he was very unjust in attributing it to himself.

Sydney Smith is often compared to Swift; but this only shows with how little thought our common criticism is written. The two men have really nothing in common, except that they were both high in the Church, and both wrote amusing letters about Ireland. Of course, to the great constructive and elaborative power displayed in Swift's longer works, Sydney Smith has no pretension; he could not have written *Gulliver's Travels;* but so far as the two series of Irish letters go, it seems plain that he has the advantage. Plymley's letters are true; the treatment may be incomplete—the Catholic religion

may have latent dangers and insidious attractions which are not there mentioned—but the main principle is sound; the common-sense of religious toleration is hardly susceptible of better explanation. Drapier's letters, on the contrary, are essentially absurd; they are a clever appeal to ridiculous prejudices. Who cares now for a disputation on the evils to be apprehended a hundred years ago from adulterated halfpence, especially when we know that the halfpence were not adulterated, and that if they had been, those evils would never have arisen? Any one, too, who wishes to make a collection of currency crotchets, will find those letters worth his attention. No doubt there is a clever affectation of common-sense, as in all of Swift's political writings, and the style has an air of business; yet, on the other hand, there are no passages which any one would now care to quote for their manner and their matter; and there are many in "Plymley" that will be constantly cited, so long as existing controversies are at all remembered. The whole genius of the two writers is emphatically opposed. Sydney Smith's is the ideal of popular, buoyant, riotous fun; it cries and laughs with boisterous mirth; it rolls hither and thither like a mob, with elastic and commonplace joy. Swift was a detective in a dean's wig; he watched the mob; his whole wit is a kind of dexterous indication of popular frailties; he hated the crowd; he was a spy on beaming smiles, and a common informer against genial enjoyment. His whole essence was a soreness against mortality. Show him innocent mirth, he would say, How absurd! He was painfully wretched, no doubt, in himself: perhaps, as they say, he had no heart; but his mind, his brain had a frightful capacity for secret pain; his sharpness was the sharpness of disease; his power the sole acumen of morbid wretchedness. It is impossible to fancy a parallel more proper to show the excellence, the unspeakable superiority of a buoyant and bounding writer.

At the same time, it is impossible to give to Sydney Smith the highest rank, even as a humorist. Almost all his humour has reference to the incongruity of special means to special ends. The notion of Plymley is want of conformity between

the notions of "my brother Abraham," and the means of which he makes use; of the quiet clergyman, who was always told he was a bit of a goose, advocating conversion by muskets, and stopping Bonaparte by Peruvian bark. The notion of the letters to Archdeacon Singleton is, a bench of bishops placidly and pleasantly destroying the Church. It is the same with most of his writings. Even when there is nothing absolutely practical in the idea, the subject is from the scenery of practice, from concrete entities, near institutions, superficial facts. You might quote a hundred instances. Here is one: "A gentleman, in speaking of a nobleman's wife of great rank and fortune, lamented very much that she had no children. A medical gentleman who was present observed that to have no children was a great misfortune, but he had often observed it was ***hereditary*** in families." This is what we mean by saying his mirth lies in the superficial relations of phenomena (some will say we are pompous, like the medical man); in the relation of one external fact to another external fact; of one detail of common life to another detail of common life. But this is not the highest topic of humour. Taken as a whole, the universe is absurd. There seems an unalterable contradiction between the human mind and its employments. How can a ***soul*** be a merchant? What relation to an immortal being have the price of linseed, the fall of butter, the tare on tallow, or the brokerage on hemp? Can an undying creature debit "petty expenses," and charge for "carriage paid"? All the world's a stage;—"the satchel, and the shining morning face"—the "strange oaths";—"the bubble reputation"—the

> "Eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws and modern instances".[1]

Can these things be real? Surely they are acting. What relation have they to the truth as we see it in theory? What connection with our certain hopes, our deep desires, our craving and infinite thought? "In respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect it is a shepherd's life, it is nought." The soul ties its shoe; the mind washes its hands in a basin. All is incongruous.

[1] Shakespeare: "As You Like It".

"*Shallow.* Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure; death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all; all shall die.—How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Silence. Truly, cousin, I was not there.

Shallow. Death is certain.—Is old Double, of your town, living yet?

Silence. Dead, sir.

Shallow. Dead. See! See! He drew a good bow,—and dead He shot a fine shoot. John of Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head.—Dead! He would have clapped i' the clout at fourscore, and carried you a forehandshaft, a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see.—How a score of ewes now?

Silence. Thereafter as they be; a score of ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow. And is Double dead!—"[1]

It is because Sydney Smith had so little of this Shakespearian humour, that there is a glare in his pages, and that in the midst of his best writing, we sigh for the soothing superiority of quieter writers.

Sydney Smith was not only the wit of the first Edinburgh, but likewise the divine. He was, to use his own expression, the only clergyman who in those days "turned out" to fight the battles of the Whigs. In some sort this was not so important. A curious abstinence from religious topics characterises the original *Review*. There is a wonderful omission of this most natural topic of speculation in the lives of Horner and Jeffrey. In truth, it would seem that, living in the incessant din of a Calvinistic country, the best course for thoughtful and serious men was to be silent—at least they instinctively thought so. They felt no involuntary call to be theological teachers themselves, and gently recoiled from the coarse admonition around them. Even in the present milder time, few cultivated persons willingly think on the special dogmas of distinct theology. They do not deny them, but they live apart from them: they do not disbelieve them, but they are silent when they are stated. They do not question the existence of Kamschatka, but they have no call to busy themselves with Kamschatka; they abstain from peculiar tenets. Nor in truth is this, though much aggravated by existing facts, a

[1] Shakespeare: "Henry IV.".

mere accident of this age. There are some people to whom such a course of conduct is always natural: there are certain persons who do not, as it would seem cannot, feel all that others feel; who have, so to say, no *ear* for much of religion: who are in some sort out of its reach. "It is impossible," says a divine of the Church of England,[1] "not to observe that innumerable persons (may we not say the majority of mankind?) who have a belief in God and immortality, have, nevertheless, scarcely any consciousness of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. They seem to live aloof from them in the world of business or of pleasure, 'the common life of all men,' not without a sense of right, and a rule of truth and honesty, yet insensible" to much which we need not name. "They have never in their whole lives experienced the love of God, the sense of sin, or the need of forgiveness. Often they are remarkable for the purity of their morals; many of them have strong and disinterested attachments and quick human sympathies; sometimes a stoical feeling of uprightness, or a peculiar sensitiveness to dishonour. It would be a mistake to say that they are without religion. They join in its public acts; they are offended at profaneness or impiety; they are thankful for the blessings of life, and do not rebel against its misfortunes. Such men meet us at every step. They are those whom we know and associate with; honest in their dealings, respectable in their lives, decent in their conversation. The Scripture speaks to us of two classes, represented by the Church and the world, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the friends and enemies of God. We cannot say in which of these two divisions we should find a place for them." They believe always a kind of "natural religion". Now these are what we may call, in the language of the present, Liberals. Those who can remember, or who will re-read our delineation of the Whig character, may observe its conformity. There is the same purity and delicacy, the same tranquil sense; an equal want of imagination, of impulsive enthusiasm, of shrinking fear. You need not speak like the above writer of "peculiar doctrines"; the phenomenon is no speciality of

[1] Dr. Jowett.

a particular creed. Glance over the whole of history. As the classical world stood beside the Jewish; as Horace beside St. Paul; like the heavy ark and the buoyant waves, so are men in contrast with one another. You cannot imagine a classical Isaiah; you cannot fancy a Whig St. Dominic; there is no such thing as a Liberal Augustine. The deep sea of mysticism lies opposed to some natures; in some moods it is a sublime wonder; in others an "impious ocean," —they will never put forth on it at any time.

All this is intelligible, and in a manner beautiful as a character; but it is not equally excellent as a creed. A certain class of Liberal divines have endeavoured to petrify into a theory, a pure and placid disposition. In some respects Sydney Smith is one of these; his sermons are the least excellent of his writings; of course they are sensible and well-intentioned, but they have the defect of his school. With misdirected energy, these divines have laboured after a plain religion; they have forgotten that a quiet and definite mind is confined to a placid and definite world; that religion has its essence in awe, its charm in infinity, its sanction in dread; that its dominion is an inexplicable dominion; that mystery is its power. There is a reluctance in all such writers; they creep away from the unintelligible parts of the subject: they always seem to have something behind;—not to like to bring out what they know to be at hand. They are in their nature apologists; and, as George the Third said: "I did not know the Bible needed an apology". As well might the thunder be ashamed to roll, as religion hesitate to be too awful for mankind. The invective of Lucretius is truer than the placid patronage of the divine. Let us admire Liberals in life, but let us keep no terms with Paleyans in speculation.

And so we must draw to a conclusion. We have in some sort given a description of, with one great exception, the most remarkable men connected at its origin with the *Edinburgh Review*. And that exception is a man of too fitful, defective, and strange greatness to be spoken of now. Henry Brougham must be left to after-times. Indeed, he would have marred the unity of our article. He was connected with the Whigs,

but he never was one. His impulsive ardour is the opposite of their coolness; his irregular, discursive intellect contrasts with their quiet and perfecting mind. Of those of whom we have spoken, let us say, that if none of them attained to the highest rank of abstract intellect; if the disposition of none of them was ardent or glowing enough to hurry them forward to the extreme point of daring greatness; if only one can be said to have a lasting place in real literature: —it is clear that they vanquished a slavish cohort; that they upheld the name of freemen in a time of bondmen; that they applied themselves to that which was real, and accomplished much which was very difficult; that the very critics who question their inimitable excellence will yet admire their just and scarcely imitable example.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY.[1]

(1856.)

THIS is a marvellous book. Everybody has read it, and every one has read it with pleasure. It has little advantage of subject. When the volumes came out, an honest man said, "I suppose something happened between the years 1689 and 1697; but what happened I do not know". Every one knows now. No period with so little obvious interest will henceforth be so familiarly known. Only a most felicitous and rather curious genius could and would shed such a light on such an age. If in the following pages we seem to cavil and find fault, let it be remembered, that the business of a critic is criticism; that it is *not* his business to be thankful; that he must attempt an estimate rather than a eulogy.

Macaulay[2] seems to have in a high degree the temperament most likely to be that of a historian. This may be summarily defined as the temperament which inclines men to take an interest in actions as contrasted with objects, and in past actions in preference to present actions. We should expand our meaning. Some people are unfortunately born scientific. They take much interest in the objects of nature. They feel a curiosity about shells, snails, horses, butterflies. They are delighted at an ichthyosaurus, and excited at a polyp; they are learned in minerals, vegetables, animals; they have skill in fishes, and attain renown in pebbles: in

[1] *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second.* By Thomas Babington Macaulay. Longmans.

[2] This paper was of course published before Lord Macaulay received his peerage.

the highest cases they know the great causes of grand phenomena, can indicate the courses of the stars or the current of the waves; but in every case their minds are directed not to the actions of man, but to the scenery amidst which he lives; not to the inhabitants of this world, but to the world itself; not to what most resembles themselves, but to that which is most unlike. What compels men to take an interest in what they do take an interest in, is commonly a difficult question—for the most part, indeed, it is an insoluble one; but in this case it would seem to have a negative cause—to result from the absence of an intense and vivid nature. The inclination of mind which abstracts the attention from that in which it can feel sympathy to that in which it cannot, seems to arise from a want of sympathy. A tendency to devote the mind to trees and stones as much as to, or in preference to, men and women, appears to imply that the intellectual qualities, the abstract reason, and the inductive scrutiny which can be applied equally to trees and to men, to stones and to women, predominate over the more special qualities solely applicable to our own race,—the keen love, the eager admiration, the lasting hatred, the lust of rule which fasten men's interests on people and to people. As a confirmation of this, we see that, even in the greatest cases, scientific men have been calm men. Their actions are unexceptionable; scarcely a spot stains their excellence: if a doubt is to be thrown on their character, it would be rather that they were insensible to the temptations than that they were involved in the offences of ordinary men. An aloofness and abstractedness cleave to their greatness. There is a coldness in their fame. We think of Euclid as of fine ice; we admire Newton as we admire the Peak of Teneriffe. Even the intensest labours, the most remote triumphs of the abstract intellect, seem to carry us into a region different from our own—to be in a *terra incognita* of pure reasoning, to cast a chill on human glory.

We know that the taste of most persons is quite opposite. The tendency of man is to take an interest in man, and almost in man only. The world has a vested interest in

itself. Analyse the minds of the crowd of men, and what will you find? Something of the outer earth, no doubt,—odd geography, odd astronomy, doubts whether Scutari is in the Crimea, investigations whether the moon is less or greater than Jupiter; some idea of herbs, more of horses; ideas, too, more or less vague, of the remote and supernatural,—notions which the tongue cannot speak, which it would seem the world would hardly bear if thoroughly spoken. Yet, setting aside these which fill the remote corners and lesser outworks of the brain, the whole stress and vigour of the ordinary faculties is expended on their possessor and his associates, on the man and on his fellows. In almost all men, indeed, this is not simply an intellectual contemplation; we not only look on, but act. The impulse to busy ourselves with the affairs of men goes further than the simple attempt to know and comprehend them: it warms us with a further life; it incites us to stir and influence those affairs; its animated energy will not rest till it has hurried us into toil and conflict. At this stage the mind of the historian, as we abstractedly fancy it, naturally breaks off: it has more interest in human affairs than the naturalist; it instinctively selects the actions of man for occupation and scrutiny, in preference to the habits of fishes or the structure of stones; but it has not so much vivid interest in them as the warm and active man. To know is sufficient for it; it can bear not to take a part. A want of impulse seems born with the disposition. To be constantly occupied about the actions of others; to have constantly presented to your contemplation and attention events and occurrences memorable only as evincing certain qualities of mind and will, which very qualities in a measure you feel within yourself, and yet to be without an impulse to exhibit them in the real world, "which is the world of all of us";[1] to contemplate, yet never act; "to have the House before you," and yet to be content with the reporters' gallery,—shows a chill impassiveness of temperament, a sluggish insensibility to ardent impulse, a heavy

[1] Wordsworth: "The Prelude," book xi,

immobility under ordinary emotion. The image of the stout Gibbon placidly contemplating the animated conflicts, the stirring pleadings of Fox and Burke, watching a revolution and heavily taking no part in it, gives an idea of the historian as he is likely to be. "Why," it is often asked, "is history dull? It is a narrative of life, and life is of all things the most interesting." The answer is, that it is written by men too dull to take the common interest in life, in whom languor predominates over zeal, and sluggishness over passion.

Macaulay is not dull, and it may seem hard to attempt to bring him within the scope of a theory which is so successful in explaining dulness. Yet, in a modified and peculiar form, we can perhaps find in his remarkable character unusually distinct traces of the insensibility which we ascribe to the historian. The means of scrutiny are ample. Macaulay has not spent his life in a corner; if posterity should refuse—of course they will not refuse—to read a line of his writings, they would yet be sought out by studious inquirers, as those of a man of high political position, great notoriety, and greater oratorical power. We are not therefore obliged, as in so many cases even among contemporaries, to search for the author's character in his books alone; we are able from other sources to find out his character, and then apply it to explain the peculiarities of his works. Macaulay has exhibited many high attainments, many dazzling talents, much singular and well-trained power; but the quality which would most strike the observers of the interior man is what may be called his *in*experiencing nature. Men of genius are in general distinguished by their extreme susceptibility to external experience. Finer and softer than other men, every exertion of their will, every incident of their lives, influences them more deeply than it would others. Their essence is at once finer and more impressible; it receives a distincter mark, and receives it more easily than the souls of the herd. From a peculiar sensibility, the man of genius bears the stamp of life commonly more clearly than his fellows; even casual associations make a deep impression on him: examine his mind, and you may discern his fortunes. Macaulay has nothing of

this. You could not tell what he has been. His mind shows no trace of change. What he is, he was; and what he was, he is. He early attained a high development, but he has not increased it since; years have come, but they have whispered little; as was said of the second Pitt, "He never grew, he was cast". The volume of speeches which he has published places the proof of this in every man's hand. His first speeches are as good as his last; his last scarcely richer than his first. He came into public life at an exciting season; he shared of course in that excitement, and the same excitement still quivers in his mind. He delivered marvellous rhetorical exercises on the Reform Bill when it passed; he speaks of it with rhetorical interest even now. He is still the man of '32. From that era he looks on the past. He sees "Old Sarum" in the seventeenth century, and Gatton in the civil wars. You may fancy an undertone. The Norman barons commenced the series of reforms which "*we* consummated"; Hampden was "preparing for the occasion in which I had a part"; William "for the debate in which I took occasion to observe". With a view to that era everything begins; up to that moment everything ascends. That was the "fifth act" of the human race; the remainder of history is only an afterpiece. All this was very natural at the moment; nothing could be more probable than that a young man of the greatest talents, entering at once into important life at a conspicuous opportunity, should exaggerate its importance; he would fancy it was the "crowning achievement," the greatest "in the tide of time". But the singularity is, that he should retain the idea now; that years have brought no influence, experience no change. The events of twenty years have been full of rich instruction on the events of twenty years ago; but they have not instructed him. His creed is a fixture. It is the same on his peculiar topic—on India. Before he went there he made a speech on the subject; Lord Canterbury, who must have heard a million speeches, said it was the best that he had ever heard. It is difficult to fancy that so much vivid knowledge could be gained from books—from horrible Indian treatises; that such imaginative mastery should be possible without actual experience. Not forgetting, or ex-

cepting, the orations of Burke, it was perhaps as remarkable a speech as was ever made on India by an Englishman who had not been in India. Now he has been there he speaks no better—rather worse; he spoke excellently without experience, he speaks no better with it,—if anything, it rather puts him out. His speech on the Indian charter a year or two ago was not finer than that on the charter of 1833. Before he went to India he recommended that writers should be examined in the classics; after being in India he recommended that they should be examined in the same way. He did not say he had seen the place in the meantime; he did not think that had anything to do with it. You could never tell from any difference in his style what he had seen, or what he had not seen. He is so insensible to passing objects, that they leave no distinctive mark, no intimate peculiar trace.

Such a man would naturally think literature more instructive than life. Hazlitt said of Mackintosh, "He might like to read an *account* of India; but India itself, with its burning, shining face, was a mere blank, an endless waste to him. Persons of this class have no more to say to a plain matter of fact staring them in the face than they have to say to a *hippopotamus*."[1] This was a keen criticism on Sir James, savouring of the splenetic mind from which it came. As a complete estimate, it would be a most unjust one of Macaulay; but we know that there is a whole class of minds which prefers the literary delineation of objects to the actual eyesight of them. To some life is difficult. An insensible nature, like a rough hide, resists the breath of passing things; an unobserving retina in vain depicts whatever a quicker eye does not explain. But any one can understand a book; the work is done, the facts observed, the formulæ suggested, the subjects classified. Of course it needs labour, and a following fancy, to peruse the long lucubrations and descriptions of others; but a fine detective sensibility is unnecessary; type is plain, an earnest attention will follow it and know it. To this class Macaulay belongs: and he has characteristically main-

[1] Essay in the *Spirit of the Age*.

tained that dead authors are more fascinating than living people.

"Those friendships," he tells us, "are exposed to no danger from the occurrences by which other attachments are weakened or dissolved. Time glides by; fortune is inconstant; tempers are soured; bonds which seemed indissoluble are daily sundered by interest, by emulation, or by caprice. But no such cause can affect the silent converse which we hold with the highest of human intellects. That placid intercourse is disturbed by no jealousies or resentments. These are the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity. With the dead there is no rivalry. In the dead there is no change. Plato is never sullen. Cervantes is never petulant. Demosthenes never comes unseasonably. Dante never stays too long. No difference of political opinion can alienate Cicero. No heresy can excite the horror of Bossuet."[1]

But Bossuet is dead; and Cicero was a Roman; and Plato wrote in Greek. Years and manners separate us from the great. After dinner, Demosthenes *may* come unseasonably; Dante *might* stay too long. *We* are alienated from the politician, and have a horror of the theologian. Dreadful idea, having Demosthenes for an intimate friend! He had pebbles in his mouth; he was always urging action; he spoke such good Greek; we cannot dwell on it,—it is too much. Only a mind impassive to our daily life, unalive to bores and evils, to joys and sorrows, incapable of the deepest sympathies, a prey to print, could imagine it. The mass of men have stronger ties and warmer hopes. The exclusive devotion to books tires. We require to love and hate, to act and live.

It is not unnatural that a person of this temperament should preserve a certain aloofness even in the busiest life. Macaulay has ever done so. He has been in the thick of political warfare, in the van of party conflict. Whatever a keen excitability would select for food and opportunity, has been his; but he has not been excited. He has never thrown himself upon action, he has never followed trivial details with an anxious passion. He has ever been a man for a great occasion. He was by nature a *deus ex machinâ*. Somebody has

[1] Essay on "Bacon".

had to fetch him. His heart was in Queen Anne's time. When he came, he spoke as Lord Halifax might have spoken. Of course, it may be contended that this is the *eximia ars;* that this solitary removed excellence is particularly and essentially sublime. But, simply and really, greater men have been more deeply "immersed in matter".[1] The highest eloquence quivers with excitement; there is life-blood in the deepest actions; a man like Stafford seems flung upon the world. An orator should never talk like an observatory; no coldness should strike upon the hearer.

It is characteristic also that Macaulay should be continually thinking of posterity. In general, that expected authority is most ungrateful: those who think of it most, it thinks of least. The way to secure its favour is, to give vivid essential pictures of the life before you; to leave a fresh glowing delineation of the scene to which you were born, of the society to which you have peculiar access. This is gained, not by thinking of your posterity, but by living in society; not by poring on what is to be, but by enjoying what is. That spirit of thorough enjoyment which pervades the great delineators of human life and human manners, was not caused by "being made after supper, out of a cheese-paring";[2] it drew its sustenance from a relishing, enjoying, sensitive life, and the flavour of the description is the reality of that enjoyment. Of course this is not so in science. You may leave a name by an abstract discovery, without having led a vigorous existence; yet what a name is this! Taylor's theorem will go down to posterity,—possibly its discoverer was for ever dreaming and expecting it would; but what does posterity know of the deceased Taylor? *Nominis umbra*[3] is rather a compliment; for it is not substantial enough to have a shadow. But in other walks,—say in political oratory, which is the part of Macaulay's composition in which his value for posterity's opinion is most apparent,—the way to interest posterity is to

[1] *Locke on the Human Understanding;* book iv., chapter iii., 1, 2.

[2] "2 King Henry IV.," iii. 2.

[3] *Stat nominis umbra;* the famous motto of Junius. (Forrest Morgan.)

think but little of it. What gives to the speeches of Demosthenes the interest they have? The intense, vivid, glowing interest of the speaker in all that he is speaking about. Philip is not a person whom "posterity will censure," but the man "whom I hate": the matter in hand not one whose interest depends on the memory of men, but in which an eager intense nature would have been absorbed, if there had been no posterity at all, on which he wished to deliver his own soul. A *casual* character, so to speak, is natural to the most intense words; externally, even, they will interest the "after world" more for having interested the present world; they must have a life of *some* place and *some* time before they can have one of all space and all time. Macaulay's oratory is the very opposite of this. Schoolboyish it is not, for it is the oratory of a very sensible man; but the theme of a schoolboy is not more devoid of the salt of circumstance. The speeches on the Reform Bill have been headed, "Now, a man came up from college and spoke thus"; and, like a college man, he spoke rather to the abstract world than to the present. He knew no more of the people who actually did live in London than of people who would live in London, and there was, therefore, no reason for speaking to one more than to the other. After years of politics, he speaks so still. He looks on a question (he says) as posterity will look on it; he appeals from this to future generations; he regards existing men as painful prerequisites of great-grandchildren. This seems to proceed, as has been said, from a distant and unimpressible nature. But it is impossible to deny that it has one great advantage: it has made him take pains. A man who speaks to people a thousand years off, will naturally speak carefully: he tries to be heard over the clang of ages, over the rumours of myriads. Writing for posterity is like writing on foreign post paper: you cannot say to a man at Calcutta what you would say to a man at Hackney; you think "the yellow man is a very long way off; this is fine paper, it will go by a ship"; so you try to say something worthy of the ship, something noble, which will keep and travel. Writers like Macaulay, who think of future people, have a respect for future people. Each syllable is solemn,

each word distinct. No author trained to periodical writing has so little of its slovenliness and its imperfection.

This singularly constant contemplation of posterity has coloured his estimate of social characters. He has no toleration for those great men in whom a lively sensibility to momentary honours has prevailed over a consistent reference to the posthumous tribunal. He is justly severe on Lord Bacon:—

"In his library, all his rare powers were under the guidance of an honest ambition, of an enlarged philanthropy, of a sincere love of truth. There no temptation drew him away from the right course. Thomas Aquinas could pay no fees, Duns Scotus could confer no peerages. The 'Master of the Sentences'[1] had no rich reversions in his gift. Far different was the situation of the great philosopher when he came forth from his study and his laboratory to mingle with the crowds which filled the galleries of Whitehall. In all that crowd there was no man equally qualified to render great and lasting services to mankind. But in all that crowd there was not a heart more set on things which no man ought to suffer to be necessary to his happiness,—on things which can often be obtained only by the sacrifice of integrity and honour. To be the leader of the human race in the career of improvement, to found on the ruins of ancient intellectual dynasties a more prosperous and more enduring empire, to be revered to the latest generations as the most illustrious among the benefactors of mankind,—all this was within his reach. But all this availed him nothing, while some quibbling special pleader was promoted before him to the bench,—while some heavy country gentleman took precedence of him by virtue of a purchased coronet,—while some pander, happy in a fair wife, could obtain a more cordial salute from Buckingham,—while some buffoon, versed in all the latest scandal of the Court, could draw a louder laugh from James."

Yet a less experience, or a less opportunity of experience, would have warned a mind more observant that the bare desire for long posthumous renown is but a feeble principle in common human nature. Bacon had as much of it as most men. The keen excitability to this world's temptations must be opposed by more exciting impulses, by more retarding discouragements, by conscience, by religion, by fear. If you would vanquish earth, you must "invent heaven". It is the fiction of a cold abstractedness that the possible respect of un-

[1] Peter the Lombard, author of a famous collection of "Sentences," from the Church fathers. (Forrest Morgan.)

seen people can commonly be more desired than the certain homage of existing people.

In a more conspicuous manner the chill nature of the most brilliant among English historians is shown in his defective dealing with the passionate eras of our history. He has never been attracted, or not proportionally attracted, by the singular mixture of heroism and slavishness, of high passion and base passion, which mark the Tudor period. The defect is apparent in his treatment of a period on which he has written powerfully—the time of the civil wars. He has never in the highest manner appreciated either of the two great characters —the Puritan and the Cavalier—which are the form and life of those years. What historian, indeed, has ever estimated the Cavalier character? There is Clarendon—the grave, rhetorical, decorous lawyer—piling words, congealing arguments,—very stately, a little grim. There is Hume—the Scotch metaphysician—who has made out the best case for such people as never were, for a Charles who never died, for a Strafford who would never have been attainted,—a saving, calculating North-countryman,—fat, impassive,—who lived on eightpence a day. What have these people to do with an enjoying English gentleman? It is easy for a doctrinaire to bear a post-mortem examination,—it is much the same whether he be alive or dead; but not so with those who live during their life, whose essence is existence, whose being is in animation. There seem to be some characters who are not made for history, as there are some who are not made for old age. A Cavalier is always young. The buoyant life arises before us rich in hope, strong in vigour, irregular in action; men young and ardent, framed in the "prodigality of nature";[1] open to every enjoyment, alive to every passion; eager, impulsive; brave without discipline; noble without principle; prizing luxury, despising danger, capable of high sentiment, but in each of whom the

> "Addiction was to courses vain;
> His companies unlettered, rude and shallow,
> His hours filled up with riots, banquets, sports,

[1] "King Richard III.," i. 2.

> And never noted in him any study,
> Any retirement, any sequestration
> From open haunts and popularity." [1]

We see these men setting forth or assembling to defend their King and Church; and we see it without surprise; a rich daring loves danger; a deep excitability likes excitement. If we look around us, we may see what is analogous. Some say that the battle of the Alma was won by the "uneducated gentry"; the "uneducated gentry" would be Cavaliers now. The political sentiment is part of the character. The essence of Toryism is enjoyment. Talk of the ways of spreading a wholesome Conservatism throughout this country: give painful lectures, distribute weary tracts (and perhaps this is as well—you may be able to give an argumentative answer to a few objections, you may diffuse a distinct notion of the dignified dulness of politics); but as far as communicating and establishing your creed are concerned—try a little pleasure. The way to keep up old customs is, to enjoy old customs; the way to be satisfied with the present state of things is, to enjoy that state of things. Over the "Cavalier" mind this world passes with a thrill of delight; there is an exultation in a daily event, zest in the "regular thing," joy at an old feast. Sir Walter Scott is an example of this. Every habit and practice of old Scotland was inseparably in his mind associated with genial enjoyment. To propose to touch one of her institutions, to abolish one of those practices, was to touch a personal pleasure —a point on which his mind reposed, a thing of memory and hope. So long as this world is this world, will a buoyant life be the proper source of an animated Conservatism. The "Church-and-King" enthusiasm has even a deeper connection with the Cavaliers. Carlyle has said, in his vivid way, "Two or three young gentlemen have said, 'Go to, I will *make* a religion'". This is the exact opposite of what the irregular, enjoying man can think or conceive. What! is he, with his untrained mind and his changeful heart and his ruleless practice, to create a creed? Is the gushing life to be asked

[1] "Henry V.," i. 1.

to construct a cistern? Is the varying heart to be its own master, the evil practice its own guide? Sooner will a ship invent its own rudder, devise its own pilot, than the eager being will find out the doctrine which is to restrain him. The very intellect is a type of the confusion of the soul. It has little arguments on a thousand subjects, hearsay sayings, original flashes, small and bright, struck from the heedless mind by the strong impact of the world. And it has nothing else. It has no systematic knowledge; it has a hatred of regular attention. What can an understanding of this sort do with refined questioning or subtle investigation? It is obliged in a sense by its very nature to take what comes; it is overshadowed in a manner by the religion to which it is born; its conscience tells it that it owes obedience to something; it craves to worship something; that something, in both cases, it takes from the past. "Thou hast not chosen me, but I have chosen thee," might his faith say to a believer of this kind. A certain bigotry is altogether natural to him. His creed seems to him a primitive fact, as certain and evident as the stars. The political faith (for it is a faith) of these persons is of a kind analogous. The virtue of loyalty assumes in them a passionate aspect, and overflows, as it were, all the intellect which belongs to the topic. This virtue, this need of our nature, arises, as political philosophers tell us, from the conscious necessity which man is under of obeying an external moral rule. We feel that we are by nature and by the constitution of all things under an obligation to conform to a certain standard, and we seek to find or to establish in the sphere without, an authority which shall enforce it, shall aid us in compelling others and also in mastering ourselves. When a man impressed with this principle comes in contact with the institution of civil government as it now exists and as it has always existed, he finds what he wants—he discovers an authority; and he feels bound to submit to it. We do not, of course, mean that all this takes place distinctly and consciously in the mind of the person; on the contrary, the class of minds most subject to its influence are precisely those which have in general the least defined and accurate

consciousness of their own operations, or of what befalls them. In matter of fact, they find themselves under the control of laws and of a polity from the earliest moment that they can remember, and they obey it from habit and custom years before they know why. Only in later life, when distinct thought is from an outward occurrence forced upon them, do they feel the necessity of some such power; and in proportion to their passionate and impulsive disposition they feel it the more. The law has in a less degree on them the same effect which military discipline has in a greater. It braces them to defined duties, and subjects them to a known authority. Quieter minds find this authority in an internal conscience; but in riotous natures its still small voice is lost if it be not echoed in loud harsh tones from the firm and outer world:—

> "Their breath is agitation, and their life
> A storm whereon they ride".[1]

From without they crave a bridle and a curb. The doctrine of non-resistance is no *accident* of the Cavalier character, though it seems at first sight singular in an eager, tumultuous disposition. So inconsistent is human nature, that it proceeds from the very extremity of that tumult. They know that they cannot allow themselves to question the authority which is upon them; they feel its necessity too acutely, their intellect is untrained in subtle disquisitions, their conscience fluctuating, their passions rising. They are sure that if they once depart from that authority, their whole soul will be in anarchy. As a riotous state tends to fall under a martial tyranny, a passionate mind tends to subject itself to an extrinsic law—to enslave itself to an outward discipline. "That is what the king says, boy, and that was ever enough for Sir Henry Lee." An hereditary monarch is, indeed, the very embodiment of this principle. The authority is so defined, so clearly vested, so evidently intelligible; it descends so distinctly from the past, it is imposed so conspicuously from without. Anything free refers to the people; anything elected seems self-chosen. "The divinity that doth hedge

[1] "Childe Harold," canto iii., verse 44.

a king"[1] consists in his evidently representing an unmade, unchosen, hereditary duty.

The greatness of this character is not in Macaulay's way, and its faults are. Its license affronts him; its riot alienates him. He is for ever contrasting the dissoluteness of Prince Rupert's Horse with the restraint of Cromwell's pikemen. A deep enjoying nature finds no sympathy. The brilliant style passes forward: we dwell on its brilliancy, but it is cold. Macaulay has no tears for that warm life, no tenderness for that extinct joy. The ignorance of the Cavalier, too, moves his wrath: "They were ignorant of what every schoolgirl knows". Their loyalty to their sovereign is the devotion of the Egyptians to the god Apis, who selected a "calf to adore". Their non-resistance offends the philosopher: their license is commented on with the tone of a precisian. Their indecorum does not suit the dignity of the narrator. Their rich free nature is unappreciated; the tingling intensity of their joy is unnoticed. In a word, there is something of the schoolboy about the Cavalier—there is somewhat of a schoolmaster about the historian.

It might be thought, at first sight, that the insensibility and coldness which are unfavourable to the appreciation of the Cavalier would be particularly favourable to that of the Puritan. Some may say that a natural aloofness from things earthly would dispose a man to the doctrines of a sect which enjoins above all other commandments abstinence and aloofness *from* those things. In Macaulay's case it certainly has had no such consequence. He was bred up in the circle which more than any other has resembled that of the greatest and best Puritans—in the circle which has presented the evangelical doctrine in its most influential and celebrated, and not its least genial form. Yet he has revolted against it. "The bray of Exeter Hall" is a phrase which has become celebrated: it is an odd one for his father's son. The whole course of his personal fortunes, the entire scope of his historical narrative, show an utter want of sympathy with the Puritan disposition. It would be idle to quote passages; it will be enough to

[1] "Hamlet," iv. 5.

recollect the contrast between the estimate—say, of Cromwell —by Carlyle and that by Macaulay, to be aware of the enormous discrepancy. The one's manner evinces an instinctive sympathy, the other's an instinctive aversion.

We believe that this is but a consequence of the same impassibility of nature which we have said so much of. M. de Montalembert, in a striking *éloge* on a French historian [1]—a man of the Southey type—after speaking of his life in Paris during youth (a youth cast in the early and exciting years of the first Revolution, and of the prelude to it), and graphically portraying a man subject to scepticism, but not given to vice; staid in habits, but unbelieving in opinion; without faith and without irregularity,—winds up the whole by the sentence, that "*he was hardened at once against good and evil*". In his view, the insensibility which was a guard against exterior temptation was also a hindrance to inward belief: and there is a philosophy in this. The nature of man is not two things, but one thing. We have not one set of affections, hopes, sensibilities, to be affected by the present world, and another and a different to be affected by the invisible world: we are moved by grandeur, or we are not; we are stirred by sublimity, or we are not; we hunger after righteousness, or we do not; we hate vice, or we do not; we are passionate, or not passionate; loving, or not loving; cold, or not cold; our heart is dull, or it is wakeful; our soul is alive, or it is dead. Deep under the surface of the intellect lies the *stratum* of the passions, of the intense, peculiar, simple impulses which constitute the heart of man; there is the eager essence, the primitive desiring being. What stirs this latent being we know. In general it is stirred by everything. Sluggish natures are stirred little, wild natures are stirred much: but all are stirred somewhat. It is not important whether the object be in the visible or invisible world: whoso loves what he has seen, will love what he has not seen; whoso hates what he has seen, will hate what he has not seen.

[1] Droz (author of the *History of Louis XIV.*, etc.), whom Montalembert succeeded in the Académie Française, and whose *éloge* he pronounced, according to custom, on 5th December, 1852. (Forrest Morgan.)

Creation is, as it were, but the garment of the Creator: whoever is blind to the beauty on its surface, will be insensible to the beauty beneath; whoso is dead to the sublimity before his senses, will be dull to that which he imagines; whoso is untouched by the visible man, will be unmoved by the invisible God. These are no new ideas; and the conspicuous evidence of history confirms them. Everywhere the deep religious organisation has been deeply sensitive to this world. If we compare what are called sacred and profane literatures, the depth of human affection is deeper in the sacred. A warmth as of life is on the Hebrew, a chill as of marble is on the Greek. In Jewish history the most tenderly religious character is the most sensitive to earth. Along every lyric of the Psalmist thrills a deep spirit of human enjoyment; he was alive as a child to the simple aspects of the world; the very errors of his mingled career are but those to which the open, enjoying character is most prone; its principle, so to speak, was a tremulous passion for that which he had seen, as well as that which he had not seen. There is no paradox, therefore, in saying that the same character which least appreciates the impulsive and ardent Cavalier is also the most likely not to appreciate the warm zeal of an overpowering devotion.

Some years ago it would have been necessary to show at length that the Puritans had such a devotion. The notion had been that they were fanatics, who simulated zeal, and hypocrites, who misquoted the Old Testament. A new era has arrived; one of the great discoveries which the competition of authors has introduced into historical researches has attained a singular popularity. Times are changed. We are rather now, in general, in danger of holding too high an estimate of the puritanical character than a too low or contemptuous one. Among the disciples of Carlyle it is considered that having been a Puritan is the next best thing to having been in Germany. But though we cannot sympathise with everything that the expounders of the new theory allege, and though we should not select for praise the exact peculiarities most agreeable to the slightly grim "gospel of earnestness," we acknowledge the great service which they have rendered to

English history. No one will now ever overlook, that in the greater, in the original Puritans—in Cromwell, for example—the whole basis of the character was a passionate, deep, rich, religious organisation.

This is not in Macaulay's way. It is not that he is sceptical; far from it. "Divines of all persuasions," he tells us, "are agreed that there is a religion"; and he acquiesces in their teaching. But he has no passionate self-questionings, no indomitable fears, no asking perplexities. He is probably pleased at the exemption. He has praised Bacon for a similar want of interest. "Nor did he ever meddle with those enigmas which have puzzled hundreds of generations, and will puzzle hundreds more. He said nothing about the grounds of moral obligation, or the freedom of the human will. He had no inclination to employ himself in labours resembling those of the damned in the Grecian Tartarus—to spin for ever on the same wheel round the same pivot. He lived in an age in which disputes on the most subtle points of divinity excited an intense interest throughout Europe; and nowhere more than in England. He was placed in the very thick of the conflict. He was in power at the time of the Synod of Dort, and must for months have been daily deafened with talk about election, reprobation, and final perseverance. Yet we do not remember a line in his works from which it can be inferred that he was either a Calvinist or an Arminian. While the world was resounding with the noise of a disputatious philosophy and a disputatious theology, the Baconian school, like Allworthy seated between Square and Thwackum,[1] preserved a calm neutrality,—half-scornful, half-benevolent,—and, content with adding to the sum of practical good, left the war of words to those who liked it." This may be the writing of good sense, but it is not the expression of an anxious or passionate religious nature.

Such is the explanation of Macaulay's not prizing so highly as he should prize the essential excellences of the Puritan character. He is defective in the one point in which they were very great; he is eminent in the very point in which they were

[1] In Fielding's *Tom Jones*.

most defective. A spirit of easy cheerfulness pervades his writings, a pleasant geniality overflows his history: the rigid asceticism, the pain for pain's sake, of the Puritan is altogether alien to him. Retribution he would deny; sin is hardly a part of his creed. His religion is one of thanksgiving. His notion of philosophy—it would be a better notion of his own writing—is *illustrans commoda vitæ.*

The English Revolution is the very topic for a person of this character. It is eminently an unimpassioned movement. It requires no appreciation of the Cavalier or of the zealot; no sympathy with the romance of this world; no inclination to pass beyond, and absorb the mind's energies in another. It had neither the rough enthusiasm of barbarism nor the delicate grace of high civilisation: the men who conducted it had neither the deep spirit of Cromwell's Puritans nor the chivalric loyalty of the enjoying English gentleman. They were hard-headed, sensible men, who knew that politics were a kind of business, that the essence of business is compromise, of practicality concession. They drove no theory to excess; for they had no theory. Their passions did not hurry them away; for their temperament was still, their reason calculating and calm. Locke is the type of the best character of his era. There is nothing in him which a historian such as we have described could fail to comprehend, or could not sympathise with when he did comprehend. He was the very reverse of a Cavalier; he came of a Puritan stock; he retained through life a kind of chilled Puritanism; he had nothing of its excessive, overpowering, interior zeal, but he retained the formal decorum which it had given to the manners, the solid earnestness of its intellect, the heavy respectability of its character. In all the nations across which Puritanism has passed you may notice something of its indifference to this world's lighter enjoyments; no one of them has been quite able to retain its singular interest in what is beyond the veil of time and sense. The generation to which we owe our Revolution was in the first stage of the descent. Locke thought a zealot a dangerous person, and a poet little better than a rascal. It has been said, with perhaps an allusion to Macaulay, that our historians have held that "all the people

who lived before 1688 were either knaves or fools". This is, of course, an exaggeration; but those who have considered what sort of a person a historian is likely to be, will not be surprised at his preference for the people of that era. They had the equable sense which he appreciates; they had not the deep animated passions to which his nature is insensible.

Yet, though Macaulay shares in the common temperament of historians, and in the sympathy with, and appreciation of, the characters most congenial to that temperament, he is singularly contrasted with them in one respect—he has a vivid fancy, they have a dull one. History is generally written on the principle that human life is a transaction; that people come to it with defined intentions and a calm self-possessed air, as stockjobbers would buy "omnium," as timber-merchants buy "best-middling"; people are alike, and things are alike; everything is a little dull, every one a little slow; manners are not depicted, traits are not noticed; the narrative is confined to those great transactions which can be understood without any imaginative delineation of their accompaniments. There are two kinds of things—those which you need only to *understand*, and those which you need also to *imagine*. That a man bought nine hundredweight of hops is an intelligible idea—you do not want the hops delineated or the man described; that he went into society suggests an inquiry—you want to know what the society was like, and how far he was fitted to be there. The great business transactions of the political world are of the intelligible description. Macaulay has himself said:—

"A history, in which every particular incident may be true, may on the whole be false. The circumstances which have most influence on the happiness of mankind, the changes of manners and morals, the transition of communities from poverty to wealth, from knowledge to ignorance, from ferocity to humanity,—these are, for the most part, noiseless revolutions. Their progress is rarely indicated by what historians are pleased to call important events. They are not achieved by armies, or enacted by senates. They are sanctioned by no treaties, and recorded in no archives. They are carried on in every school, in every church, behind ten thousand counters, at ten thousand firesides. The upper current of society presents no certain criterion by which we can judge of the direction in which the undercurrent flows. We read of defeats and victories; but we know that

nations may be miserable amidst victories, and prosperous amidst defeats. We read of the fall of wise ministers, and of the rise of profligate favourites; but we must remember how small a proportion the good or evil effected by a single statesman can bear to the good or evil of a great social system."[1]

But of this sluggishness of imagination he has certainly no trace himself. He is willing to be "behind ten thousand counters," to be a guest "at ten thousand firesides". He is willing to see "ordinary men as they appear in their ordinary business and in their ordinary pleasures". He has no objection to "mingle in the crowds of the Exchange and the coffee-house". He would "obtain admittance to the convivial table and the domestic hearth". So far as his dignity will permit, "he will bear with vulgar expressions". And a singular efficacy of fancy gives him the power to do so. Some portion of the essence of human nature is concealed from him; but all its accessories are at his command. He delineates any trait; he can paint, and justly paint, any manners he chooses.

"A perfect historian," he tells us, "is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature. He relates no fact, he attributes no expression to his characters, which is not authenticated by sufficient testimony; but, by judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement, he gives to truth those attractions which have been usurped by fiction. In his narrative a due subordination is observed—some transactions are prominent, others retire; but the scale on which he represents them is increased or diminished, not according to the dignity of the persons concerned in them, but according to the degree in which they elucidate the condition of society and the nature of man. He shows us the court, the camp, and the senate; but he shows us also the nation. He considers no anecdote, no peculiarity of manner, no familiar saying, as too insignificant for his notice, which is not too insignificant to illustrate the operation of laws, of religion, and of education, and to mark the progress of the human mind. Men will not merely be described, but will be made intimately known to us. The changes of manners will be indicated, not merely by a few general phrases, or a few extracts from statistical documents, but by appropriate images presented in every line. If a man, such as we are supposing, should write the history of England, he would assuredly not omit the battles, the sieges, the negotiations, the seditions, the ministerial changes; but with these he would intersperse the details which are the charm of historical romances. At Lincoln Cathedral there is a beautiful

[1] Essay on "History". All the other quotations on this page are from the same source.

painted window, which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master. It is so far superior to every other in the church, that, according to the tradition, the vanquished artist killed himself from mortification. Sir Walter Scott, in the same manner, has used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them in a manner which may well excite their envy. He has constructed out of their gleanings works which, even considered as histories, are scarcely less valuable than theirs. But a truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated. The history of the Government, and the history of the people, would be exhibited in that mode in which alone they can be exhibited justly, in inseparable conjunction and intermixture. We should not then have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon, and for their phraseology in *Old Mortality;* for one half of King James in Hume, and for the other half in the *Fortunes of Nigel.*"[1]

So far as the graphic description of exterior life goes, he has completely realised his idea.

This union of a flowing fancy with an insensible organisation is very rare. In general, a delicate fancy is joined with a poetic organisation. Exactly why, it would be difficult to explain. It is for metaphysicians in large volumes to explain the genesis of the human faculties; but, as a fact, it seems to be clear that, for the most part, imaginative men are the most sensitive to the poetic side of human life and natural scenery. They are drawn by a strong instinct to what is sublime, grand, and beautiful. They do not care for the coarse business of life. They dislike to be cursed with its ordinary cares. Their nature is vivid; it is interested by all which naturally interests; it dwells on the great, the graceful, and the grand. On this account it naturally runs away from history. The very name of it is too oppressive. Are not all such works written in the *Index Expurgatorius* of the genial satirist as works which it was impossible to read?[2] The coarse and cumbrous matter revolts the soul of the fine and fanciful voluptuary. Take it as you will, human life is like the earth on which man dwells. There are exquisite beauties, grand imposing objects, scattered here and there; but the spaces between these are wide; the mass of common clay is huge; the dead level of vacant life,

[1] Essay on "History".

[2] Lamb: *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading.*

of commonplace geography, is immense. The poetic nature cannot bear the preponderance; it seeks relief in selected scenes, in special topics, in favourite beauties. History, which is the record of human existence, is a faithful representative of it, at least in this: the poetic mind cannot bear the weight of its narrations and the commonplaceness of its events.

This peculiarity of character gives to Macaulay's writing one of its most curious characteristics. He throws over matters which are in their nature dry and dull,—transactions —budgets—bills,—the charm of fancy which a poetical mind employs to enhance and set forth the charm of what is beautiful. An attractive style is generally devoted to what is in itself specially attractive; here it is devoted to subjects which are often unattractive, are sometimes even repelling, at the best are commonly neutral, not inviting attention, if they do not excite dislike. In these new volumes there is a currency reform, pages on Scotch Presbyterianism, a heap of Parliamentary debates. Who could be expected to make anything interesting of such topics? It is not cheerful to read in the morning papers the debates of yesterday, though they happened last night; we cannot like a Calvinistic divine when we see him in the pulpit; it is awful to read on the currency, even when it concerns the bank-notes which we use. How, then, can we care for a narrative when the divine is dead, the shillings extinct, the whole topic of the debate forgotten and passed away? Yet such is the power of style, so great is the charm of very skilful words, of narration which is always passing forward, of illustration which always hits the mark, that such subjects as these not only become interesting, but very interesting. The proof is evident. No book is so sought after. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said "all members of Parliament had read it". What other books could ever be fancied to have been read by them? A county member—a real county member —hardly reads too volumes *per* existence. Years ago Macaulay said a History of England might become more in demand at the circulating libraries than the last novel. He has actually made his words true. It is no longer a phrase of rhetoric, it is a simple fact.

The explanation of this remarkable notoriety is, the contrast of the topic and the treatment. Those who read for the sake of entertainment are attracted by the one; those who read for the sake of instruction are attracted by the other. Macaulay has something that suits the readers of Mr. Hallam; he has something which will please the readers of Mr. Thackeray. The first wonder to find themselves reading such a style; the last are astonished at reading on such topics —at finding themselves studying by casualty. This marks the author. Only a buoyant fancy and an impassive temperament could produce a book so combining weight with levity.

Something similar may be remarked of the writings of a still greater man—of Edmund Burke. The contrast between the manner of his characteristic writings and their matter is very remarkable. He too threw over the detail of business and of politics those graces and attractions of manner which seem in some sort inconsistent with them; which are adapted for topics more intrinsically sublime and beautiful. It was for this reason that Hazlitt asserted that "no woman ever cared for Burke's writings". The matter, he said, was "hard and dry," and no superficial glitter of eloquence could make it agreeable to those who liked what is, in its very nature, fine and delicate. The charm of exquisite narration has, in a great degree, in Macaulay's case, supplied the deficiency; but it may be *perhaps* remarked, that some trace of the same phenomenon has again occurred, from similar causes, and that his popularity, though great among both sexes, is in some sense more masculine than feminine. The absence of this charm of narration, to which accomplished women are, it would seem, peculiarly sensitive, is very characteristic of Burke. His mind was the reverse of historical. Although he had rather a coarse, incondite temperament, not finely susceptible to the best influences, to the most exquisite beauties of the world in which he lived, he yet lived in that world thoroughly and completely. He did not take an interest, as a poet does, in the sublime, because it is sublime, in the beautiful, because it is beautiful; but he had the passions of more ordinary men in a degree, and of an intensity, which ordinary men may be most thank-

ful that they have not. In no one has the intense faculty of intellectual hatred—the hatred which the absolute dogmatist has for those in whom he incarnates and personifies the opposing dogma—been fiercer or stronger; in no one has the intense ambition to rule and govern,—in scarcely any one has the daily ambition of the daily politician been fiercer and stronger: he, if any man, cast himself upon his time. After one of his speeches, peruse one of Macaulay's: you seem transported to another sphere. The fierce living interest of the one contrasts with the cold rhetorical interest of the other; you are in a different part of the animal kingdom; you have left the viviparous intellect; you have left products warm and struggling with hasty life; you have reached the oviparous, and products smooth and polished, cold and stately.

In addition to this impassive nature, inclining him to write on past transactions—to this fancy, enabling him to adorn and describe them—Macaulay has a marvellous memory to recall them; and what we may call the Scotch intellect, enabling him to conceive them. The memory is his most obvious power. An enormous reading seems always present to him. No effort seems wanted—no mental excogitation. According to his own description of a like faculty, "it would have been strange indeed if you had asked for anything that was not to be found in that immense storehouse. The article you required was not only there, it was ready. It was in its own compartment. In a moment it was brought down, unpacked, and explained."[1] He has a literary illustration for everything; and his fancy enables him to make a skilful use of his wealth. He always selects the exact likeness of the idea which he wishes to explain. And though it be less obvious, yet his writing would have been deficient in one of its most essential characteristics if it had not been for what we have called his Scotch intellect, which is a curious matter to explain. It may be thought that Adam Smith had little in common with Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter was always making fun of him; telling odd tales of his abstraction and singularity; not obscurely hinting, that a man who could hardly put on his

[1] Essay on "Sir James Mackintosh".

own coat, and certainly could not buy his own dinner, was scarcely fit to decide on the proper course of industry and the mercantile dealings of nations. Yet, when Sir Walter's own works come to be closely examined, they will be found to contain a good deal of political economy of a certain sort,—and not a very bad sort. Any one who will study his description of the Highland clans in *Waverley;* his observations on the industrial side (if so it is to be called) of the Border-life; his plans for dealing with the poor of his own time,—will be struck not only with a plain sagacity, which we could equal in England, but with the digested accuracy and theoretical completeness which they show. You might cut paragraphs, even from his lighter writings, which would be thought acute in the *Wealth of Nations*. There appears to be in the genius of the Scotch people—fostered, no doubt, by the abstract metaphysical education of their Universities, but, also, by way of natural taste, supporting that education, and rendering it possible and popular—a power of reducing human actions to formulæ or principles. An instance is now in a high place. People who are not lawyers,—rural people, who have sense of their own, but have no access to the general repute and opinion which expresses the collective sense of the great world,—never can be brought to believe that Lord Campbell is a great man. They read his speeches in the House of Lords—his occasional flights of eloquence on the Bench—his attempts at pathos—his stupendous *gaucheries*—and they cannot be persuaded that a person guilty of such things can have really first-rate talent. If you ask them how he came to be Chief Justice of England, they mutter something angry, and say, "Well, Scotchmen *do* get on somehow". This is really the true explanation. In spite of a hundred defects, Lord Campbell has the Scotch faculties in perfection. He reduces legal matters to a sound broad principle better than any man who is now a judge. He has a steady, comprehensive, abstract, distinct consistency, which elaborates a formula and adheres to a formula; and it is this which has raised him from a plain—a very plain—Scotch lawyer to be Lord Chief Justice of England. Macaulay has this too. Among his more brilliant qualities, it has

escaped the attention of critics; the more so, because his powers of exposition and expression make it impossible to conceive for a moment that the amusing matter we are reading is really Scotch economy.

"During the interval," he tells us, "between the Restoration and the Revolution, the riches of the nation had been rapidly increasing. Thousands of busy men found every Christmas that, after the expenses of the year's housekeeping had been defrayed out of the year's income, a surplus remained; and how that surplus was to be employed was a question of some difficulty. In our time, to invest such a surplus, at something more than three per cent., on the best security that has ever been known in the world, is the work of a few minutes. But in the seventeenth century, a lawyer, a physician, a retired merchant, who had saved some thousands, and who wished to place them safely and profitably, was often greatly embarrassed. Three generations earlier, a man who had accumulated wealth in a profession generally purchased real property, or lent his savings on mortgage. But the number of acres in the kingdom had remained the same; and the value of those acres, though it had greatly increased, had by no means increased so fast as the quantity of capital which was seeking for employment. Many, too, wished to put their money where they could find it at an hour's notice, and looked about for some species of property which could be more readily transferred than a house or a field. A capitalist might lend on bottomry or on personal security; but, if he did so, he ran a great risk of losing interest and principal. There were a few joint-stock companies, among which the East India Company held the foremost place; but the demand for the stock of such companies was far greater than the supply. Indeed, the cry for a new East India Company was chiefly raised by persons who had found difficulty in placing their savings at interest on good security. So great was that difficulty, that the practice of hoarding was common. We are told that the father of Pope, the poet, who retired from business in the City about the time of the Revolution, carried to a retreat in the country a strong box containing nearly twenty thousand pounds, and took out from time to time what was required for household expenses; and it is highly probable that this was not a solitary case. At present, the quantity of coin which is hoarded by private persons is so small, that it would, if brought forth, make no perceptible addition to the circulation. But, in the earlier part of the reign of William the Third, all the greatest writers on currency were of opinion that a very considerable mass of gold and silver was hidden in secret drawers and behind wainscots.

"The natural effect of this state of things was, that a crowd of projectors, ingenious and absurd, honest and knavish, employed themselves in devising new schemes for the employment of redundant capital. It was about the year 1688 that the word stockjobber was first heard in Lon-

don. In the short space of four years a crowd of companies, every one of which confidently held out to subscribers the hope of immense gains, sprang into existence: the Insurance Company, the Paper Company, the Lute-string Company, the Pearl-Fishery Company, the Glass-Bottle Company, the Alum Company, the Blythe Coal Company, the Swordblade Company. There was a Tapestry Company, which would soon furnish pretty hangings for all the parlours of the middle class and for all the bedchambers of the higher. There was a Copper Company, which proposed to explore the mines of England, and held out a hope that they would prove not less valuable than those of Potosi. There was a Diving Company, which undertook to bring up precious effects from shipwrecked vessels, and which announced that it had laid in a stock of wonderful machines, resembling complete suits of armour. In front of the helmet was a huge glass eye, like that of a Cyclop; and out of the crest went a pipe, through which the air was to be admitted. The whole process was exhibited on the Thames. Fine gentlemen and fine ladies were invited to the show, were hospitably regaled, and were delighted by seeing the divers in their panoply descend into the river, and return laden with old iron and ship's tackle. There was a Greenland Fishing Company, which could not fail to drive the Dutch whalers and herring-busses out of the Northern Ocean. There was a Tanning Company, which promised to furnish leather superior to the best that was brought from Turkey or Russia. There was a society which undertook the office of giving gentlemen a liberal education on low terms, and which assumed the sounding name of the Royal Academies Company. In a pompous advertisement it was announced that the directors of the Royal Academies Company had engaged the best masters in every branch of knowledge, and were about to issue twenty thousand tickets at twenty shillings each. There was to be a lottery: two thousand prizes were to be drawn; and the fortunate holders of the prizes were to be taught, at the charge of the Company, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, conic sections, trigonometry, heraldry, japanning, fortification, book-keeping, and the art of playing the theorbo. Some of these companies took large mansions, and printed their advertisements in gilded letters. Others, less ostentatious, were content with ink, and met at coffee-houses in the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange. Jonathan's and Garraway's were in a constant ferment with brokers, buyers, sellers, meetings of directors, meetings of proprietors. Time-bargains soon came into fashion. Extensive combinations were formed, and monstrous fables were circulated, for the purpose of raising or depressing the price of shares. Our country witnessed for the first time those phenomena with which a long experience has made us familiar. A mania, of which the symptoms were essentially the same with those of the mania of 1720, of the mania of 1825, of the mania of 1845, seized the public mind. An impatience to be rich, a contempt for those slow but sure gains which are the proper reward of industry, patience, and thrift, spread through society. The spirit of the cogging dicers at

Whitefriars took possession of the grave senators of the City, wardens of trades, deputies, aldermen. It was much easier and much more lucrative to put forth a lying prospectus announcing a new stock, to persuade ignorant people that the dividends could not fall short of twenty per cent., and to part with five thousand pounds of this imaginary wealth for ten thousand solid guineas, than to load a ship with a well-chosen cargo for Virginia or the Levant. Every day some new bubble was puffed into existence, rose buoyant, shone bright, burst, and was forgotten."[1]

You will not find the cause of panics so accurately explained in the dryest of political economists—in the Scotch M'Culloch.

These peculiarities of character and mind may be very conspicuously traced through the *History of England*, and in the *Essays*. Their first and most striking quality is the *intellectual entertainment* which they afford. This, as practical readers know, is a kind of sensation which is not very common, and which is very productive of great and healthy enjoyment. It is quite distinct from the amusement which is derived from common light works. The latter is very great; but it is passive. The mind of the reader is not awakened to any independent action: you see the farce, but you see it without effort; not simply without painful effort, but without any perceptible mental activity whatever. Again, entertainment of intellect is contrasted with the high enjoyment of consciously following pure and difficult reasoning; such a sensation is a sort of sublimated pain. The highest and most intense action of the intellectual powers is like the most intense action of the bodily on a high mountain. We climb and climb: we have a thrill of pleasure, but we have also a sense of effort and anguish. Nor is the sensation to be confounded with that which we experience from the best and purest works of art. The pleasure of high tragedy is also painful: the whole soul is stretched; the spirit pants; the passions scarcely breathe: it is a rapt and eager moment, too intense for continuance—so overpowering, that we scarcely know whether it be joy or pain. The sensation of intellectual entertainment is altogether distinguished from these by not being accompanied by any pain, and yet being consequent on, or being contemporaneous with,

[1] *History of England*, chap. xix.

a high and constant exercise of mind. While we read works which so delight us, we are conscious that we are delighted, and are conscious that we are not idle. The opposite pleasures of indolence and exertion seem for a moment combined. A sort of elasticity pervades us; thoughts come easily and quickly; we seem capable of many ideas; we follow cleverness till we fancy that we are clever. This feeling is only given by writers who stimulate the mind just to the degree which is pleasant, and who do not stimulate it more; who exact a moderate exercise of mind, and who seduce us to it insensibly. This can only be, of course, by a charm of style; by the inexplicable *je ne sais quoi* which attracts our attention; by constantly raising and constantly satisfying our curiosity. And there seems to be a further condition. A writer who wishes to produce this constant effect must not appeal to any single, separate faculty of mind, but to the whole mind at once. The fancy tires, if you appeal only to the fancy; the understanding is aware of its dulness, if you appeal only to the understanding; the curiosity is soon satiated, unless you pique it with variety. This is the very opportunity for Macaulay. He has fancy, sense, abundance; he appeals to both fancy and understanding. There is no sense of effort. His books read like an elastic dream. There is a continual sense of instruction; for who had an idea of the transactions before? The emotions, too, which he appeals to are the easy admiration, the cool disapprobation, the gentle worldly curiosity, which quietly excite us, never fatigue us,—which we could bear for ever. To read Macaulay for a day, would be to pass a day of easy thought, of pleasant placid emotion.

Nor is this a small matter. In a state of high civilisation it is no simple matter to give multitudes a large and healthy enjoyment. The old bodily enjoyments are dying out; there is no room for them any more; the complex apparatus of civilisation cumbers the ground. We are thrown back upon the mind, and the mind is a barren thing. It can spin little from itself: few that describe what they see are in the way to discern much. Exaggerated emotions, violent incidents, monstrous characters, crowd our canvas; they are the resource

of a weakness which would obtain the fame of strength. Reading is about to become a series of collisions against aggravated breakers, of beatings with imaginary surf. In such times a book of sensible attraction is a public benefit; it diffuses a sensation of vigour through the multitude. Perhaps there is a danger that the extreme popularity of the manner may make many persons fancy they understand the matter more perfectly than they do: some readers may become conceited; several boys believe that they too are Macaulays. Yet, duly allowing for this defect, it is a great good that so many people should learn so much on such topics so agreeably; that they should feel that they *can* understand them; that their minds should be stimulated by a consciousness of health and power.

The same peculiarities influence the style of the narrative. The art of narration is the art of writing in hooks-and-eyes. The principle consists in making the appropriate thought follow the appropriate thought, the proper fact the proper fact; in first preparing the mind for what is to come, and then letting it come. This can only be achieved by keeping continually and insensibly before the mind of the reader some one object, character, or image, whose variations are the events of the story, whose unity is the unity of it. Scott, for example, keeps before you the mind of some one person,—that of Morton in *Old Mortality*, of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, of Lovel in *The Antiquary*,—whose fortunes and mental changes are the central incidents, whose personality is the string of unity. It is the defect of the great Scotch novels that their central figure is frequently not their most interesting topic,—that their interest is often rather in the accessories than in the essential principle, rather in that which surrounds the centre of narration than in the centre itself. Scott tries to meet this objection by varying the mind which he selects for his unit; in one of his chapters it is one character, in the next a different; he shifts the scene from the hero to the heroine, from the "Protector of the settlement" of the story to the evil being who mars it perpetually: but when narrowly examined, the principle of his narration will be found nearly always the same,—the changes in the

position—external or mental—of some one human being. The most curiously opposite sort of narration is that of Hume. He seems to carry a *view*, as the moderns call it, through everything. He forms to himself a metaphysical—that perhaps is a harsh word—an intellectual conception of the time and character before him; and the gradual working out or development of that view is the principle of his narration. He tells the story of the conception. You rise from his pages without much remembrance of or regard for the mere people, but with a clear notion of an elaborated view, skilfully abstracted and perpetually impressed upon you. A critic of detail should scarcely require a better task than to show how insensibly and artfully the subtle historian infuses his doctrine among the facts, indicates somehow—you can scarcely say how—their relation to it; strings them, as it were, upon it, concealing it in seeming beneath them, while in fact it altogether determines their form, their grouping, and their consistency. The style of Macaulay is very different from either of these. It is a diorama of political pictures. You seem to begin with a brilliant picture,—its colours are distinct, its lines are firm; on a sudden it changes, at first gradually, you can scarcely tell how or in what, but truly and unmistakably,—a slightly different picture is before you; then the second vision seems to change,—it too is another and yet the same; then the third shines forth and fades; and so without end. The unity of this delineation is the identity—the apparent identity—of the picture; in no two moments does it seem quite different, in no two is it identically the same. It grows and alters as our bodies would appear to alter and grow, if you could fancy any one watching them, and being conscious of their daily little changes. The events are picturesque variations; the unity is a unity of political painting, of represented external form. It is evident how suitable this is to a writer whose understanding is solid, whose sense is political, whose fancy is fine and delineative.

To this merit of Macaulay is to be added another. No one describes so well what we may call the *spectacle* of a character. The art of delineating character by protracted

description is one which grows in spite of the critics. In vain is it alleged that the character should be shown dramatically; that it should be illustrated by events; that it should be exhibited in its actions. The truth is, that these homilies are excellent, but incomplete; true, but out of season. There is a utility in verbal portrait, as Lord Stanhope says there is in painted. Goethe used to observe, that in society—in a *tête-à-tête*, rather—you often thought of your companion as if he was his portrait: you were silent; you did not care what he said; but you considered him as a picture, as a whole, especially as regards yourself and your relations towards him.[1] You require something of the same kind in literature; *some* description of a man is clearly necessary as an introduction to the story of his life and actions. But more than this is wanted; you require to have the object placed before you as a whole, to have the characteristic traits mentioned, the delicate qualities drawn out, the firm features gently depicted. As the practice which Goethe hints at is, of all others, the most favourable to a just and calm judgment of character, so the literary substitute is essential as a steadying element, as a summary, to bring together and give a unity to our views. We must see the man's face. Without it, we seem to have heard a great deal about the person, but not to have known him; to be aware that he had done a good deal, but to have no settled, ineradicable notion what manner of man he was. This is the reason why critics like Macaulay, who sneer at the practice when estimating the work of others, yet make use of it at great length, and, in his case, with great skill, when they come to be historians themselves. The kind of characters whom Macaulay can describe is limited—at least we think so—by the bounds which we indicated just now. There are some men whom he is too impassive to comprehend; but he can always tell us of such as he does comprehend, what they looked like, and what they were.

A great deal of this vividness Macaulay of course owes to his style. Of its effectiveness there can be no doubt; its agreeableness no one who has just been reading it is likely

[1] *Elective Affinities*, part ii., chap. ii.

to deny. Yet it has a defect. It is not, as Bishop Butler would have expressed it, such a style as "is suitable to such a being as man, in such a world as the present one". It is too omniscient. Everything is too plain. All is clear; nothing is doubtful. Instead of probability being, as the great thinker expressed it, "the very guide of life,"[1] it has become a rare exception—an uncommon phenomenon. You rarely come across anything which is not decided; and when you do come across it, you seem to wonder that the positiveness, which has accomplished so much, should have been unwilling to decide everything. This is hardly the style for history. The data of historical narratives, especially of modern histories, are a heap of confusion. No one can tell where they lie, or where they do not lie; what is in them, or what is not in them. Literature is called the "fragment of fragments"; little has been written, and but little of that little has been preserved. So history is a vestige of vestiges; few facts leave any trace of themselves, any witness of their occurrence; of fewer still is that witness preserved; a slight track is all anything leaves, and the confusion of life, the tumult of change, sweeps even that away in a moment. It is not possible that these data can be very fertile in certainties. Few people would make anything of them: a memoir here, a MS. there—two letters in a magazine—an assertion by a person whose veracity is denied,—these are the sort of evidence out of which a flowing narrative is to be educed; and of course it ought not to be too flowing. "If you please, sir, tell me what you do *not* know," was the inquiry of a humble pupil addressed to a great man of science. It would have been a relief to the readers of Macaulay if he had shown a little the outside of uncertainties, which there must be—the gradations of doubt, which there ought to be—the singular accumulation of difficulties, which must beset the extraction of a very easy narrative from very confused materials.

This defect in style is, indeed, indicative of a defect in understanding. Macaulay's mind is eminently gifted, but there is a want of graduation in it. He has a fine eye for

[1] Introduction to *Butler's Analogy*.

probabilities, a clear perception of evidence, a shrewd guess at missing links of fact; but each probability seems to him a certainty, each piece of evidence conclusive, each analogy exact. The heavy Scotch intellect is a little prone to this: one figures it as a heap of formulæ, and if fact *b* is reducible to formula B, that is all which it regards; the mathematical mill grinds with equal energy at flour perfect and imperfect —at matter which is quite certain and at matter which is only a little probable. But the great cause of this error is, an abstinence from practical action. Life is a school of probability. In the writings of every man of patient practicality, in the midst of whatever other defects, you will find a careful appreciation of the degrees of likelihood; a steady balancing of them one against another; a disinclination to make things too clear, to overlook the debit side of the account in mere contemplation of the enormousness of the credit. The reason is obvious: action is a business of risk; the real question is the magnitude of that risk. Failure is ever impending; success is ever uncertain; there is always, in the very best of affairs, a slight probability of the former, a contingent possibility of the non-occurrence of the latter. For practical men, the problem ever is to test the amount of these inevitable probabilities; to make sure that no one increases too far; that by a well-varied choice the number of risks may in itself be a protection—be an insurance to you, as it were, against the capricious result of any one. A man like Macaulay, who stands aloof from life, is not so instructed; he sits secure: nothing happens in his study: he does not care to test probabilities; he loses the detective sensation.

Macaulay's so-called inaccuracy is likewise a phase of this defect. Considering the enormous advantages which a picturesque style gives to ill-disposed critics; the number of points of investigation which it suggests; the number of assertions it makes, sentence by sentence; the number of ill-disposed critics that there are in the world; remembering Macaulay's position—set on a hill to be spied at by them—he can scarcely be thought an inaccurate historian. Considering all things, they have found few certain blunders, hardly any direct

mistakes. Every sentence of his style requires minute knowledge; the vivid picture has a hundred details; each of those details must have an evidence, an authority, a proof. A historian like Hume passes easily over a period; his chart is large; if he gets the conspicuous headlands, the large harbours duly marked, he does not care. Macaulay puts in the depth of each wave, every remarkable rock, every tree on the shore. Nothing gives a critic so great an advantage. It is difficult to do this for a volume; simple for a page. It is easy to select a particular event, and learn all which any one can know about it; examine Macaulay's descriptions, say he is wrong, that X is not buried where he asserts, that a little boy was one year older than he states. But how would the critic manage, if he had to work out all this for a million facts, for a whole period? Few men, we suspect, would be able to make so few errors of simple and provable fact. On the other hand, few men would arouse a sleepy critic by such startling assertion. If Macaulay finds a new theory, he states it as a fact. Very likely it really is the most probable theory; at any rate, we know of no case in which his theory is not one among the most plausible. If it had only been so stated, it would have been well received. His view of Marlborough's character, for instance, is a specious one; it has a good deal of evidence, a large amount of real probability, but it has scarcely more. Marlborough *may* have been as bad as is said, but we can hardly be *sure* of it at this time.

Macaulay's "party-spirit" is another consequence of his positiveness. When he inclines to a side, he inclines to it too much. His opinions are a shade too strong; his predilections some degrees at least too warm. William is too perfect, James too imperfect. The Whigs are a trifle like angels; the Tories like, let us say, "our inferiors". Yet this is evidently an honest party-spirit. It does not lurk in the corners of sentences, it is not insinuated without being alleged; it does not, like the unfairness of Hume, secrete itself so subtly in the turns of the words, that when you look to prove it, it is gone. On the contrary, it rushes into broad day. William is loaded with panegyric; James is always spoken evil of. Hume's is

the artful pleading of a hired advocate; Macaulay's the bold eulogy of a sincere friend. As far as effect goes, this is an error. The very earnestness of the affection leads to a reaction; we are tired of having William called the "just"; we cannot believe so many pages; "all that" can scarcely be correct. As we said, if the historian's preference for persons and parties had been duly tempered and mitigated, if the probably good were only said to be probably good, if the rather bad were only alleged to be rather bad, the reader would have been convinced, and the historian would have escaped the savage censure of envious critics.

The one thing which detracts from the pleasure of reading these volumes, is the doubt whether they should have been written. Should not these great powers be reserved for great periods? Is this abounding, picturesque style suited for continuous history? Are small men to be so largely described? Should not admirable delineation be kept for admirable people? We think so. You do not want Raphael to paint sign-posts, or Palladio to build dirt-pies. Much of history is necessarily of little value,—the superficies of circumstance, the scum of events. It is very well to have it described, indeed you must have it described; the chain must be kept complete; the narrative of a country's fortunes will not allow of breaks or gaps. Yet all things need not be done equally well. The life of a great painter is short. Even the industry of Macaulay will not complete this history. It is a pity to spend such powers on such events. It would have been better to have some new volumes of essays solely on great men and great things. The diffuseness of the style would have been then in place; we could have borne to hear the smallest *minutiæ* of magnificent epochs. If an inferior hand had executed the connecting links, our notions would have acquired an insensible perspective; the works of the great artist, the best themes, would have stood out from the canvas. They are now confused by the equal brilliancy of the adjacent inferiorities.

Much more might be said on this narrative. As it will be read for very many years, it will employ the critics for very many years. It would be unkind to make all the best obser-

vations. Something, as Mr. Disraeli said in a budget-speech, something should be left for "future statements of this nature". There will be an opportunity. Whatever those who come after may say against this book, it will be, and remain, the "Pictorial History of England".

EDWARD GIBBON.[1]

(1856.)

A WIT said of Gibbon's autobiography, that he did not know the difference between himself and the Roman Empire. He has narrated his "progressions from London to Buriton, and from Buriton to London," in the same monotonous majestic periods that record the fall of states and empires. The consequence is, that a fascinating book gives but a vague idea of its subject. It may not be without its use to attempt a description of him in plainer though less splendid English.

The diligence of their descendant accumulated many particulars of the remote annals of the Gibbon family; but its real founder was the grandfather of the historian, who lived in the times of the "South Sea". He was a capital man of business according to the custom of that age—a dealer in many kinds of merchandise—like perhaps the "complete tradesman" of Defoe, who was to understand the price and quality of *all* articles made within the kingdom. The preference, however, of Edward Gibbon the grandfather was for the article "shares"; his genius, like that of Mr. Hudson, had a natural tendency towards a commerce in the metaphysical and non-existent; and he was fortunate in the age on which his lot was thrown. It afforded many opportunities of gratifying that taste. Much has been written on panics and manias—much more than with the most outstretched intellect we are able to follow or conceive; but one thing is certain, that at particular times a great

[1] *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* By Edward Gibbon, Esq. With Notes by Dean Milman and M. Guizot. Edited, with additional Notes, by William Smith, LL.D. In Eight Volumes. London, 1855. Murray.

many stupid people have a great deal of stupid money. Saving people have often only the faculty of saving; they accumulate ably, and contemplate their accumulations with approbation; but what to do with them they do not know. Aristotle, who was not in trade, imagined that money is barren; and barren it is to quiet ladies, rural clergymen, and country misers. Several economists have plans for preventing improvident speculation; one would abolish Peel's act, and substitute one-pound notes; another would retain Peel's act, and make the calling for one-pound notes a capital crime: but our scheme is, not to allow any man to have a hundred pounds who cannot prove to the satisfaction of the Lord Chancellor that he knows what to do with a hundred pounds. The want of this easy precaution allows the accumulation of wealth in the hands of rectors, authors, grandmothers, who have no knowledge of business, and no idea except that their money now produces nothing, and ought and must be forced immediately to produce something. "I wish," said one of this class, "for the largest immediate income, and I am therefore naturally disposed to purchase an *advowson*". At intervals, from causes which are not to the present purpose, the money of these people—the blind capital (as we call it) of the country—is particularly large and craving; it seeks for some one to devour it, and there is "plethora"—it finds some one, and there is "speculation" —it is devoured, and there is "panic". The age of Mr. Gibbon was one of these. The interest of money was very low, perhaps under three per cent. The usual consequence followed; able men started wonderful undertakings; the ablest of all, a company "for carrying on an undertaking of great importance, but no one to know what it was". Mr. Gibbon was not idle. According to the narrative of his grandson, he already filled a considerable position, was worth sixty thousand pounds, and had great influence both in Parliament and in the City. He applied himself to the greatest bubble of all—one so great, that it is spoken of in many books as the cause and parent of all contemporary bubbles—the South-Sea Company—the design of which was to reduce the interest on the national debt, which, oddly enough, it did

reduce, and to trade exclusively to the South Sea or Spanish America, where of course it hardly did trade. Mr. Gibbon became a director, sold and bought, traded and prospered; and was considered, perhaps with truth, to have obtained much money. The bubble was essentially a fashionable one. Public intelligence and the quickness of communication did not then as now at once spread pecuniary information and misinformation to secluded districts; but fine ladies, men of fashion—the London world—ever anxious to make as much of its money as it can, and then wholly unwise (it is not now very wise) in discovering how the most *was* to be made of it—"went in" and speculated largely. As usual, all was favourable as long as the shares were rising; the price was at one time very high, and the agitation very general; it was, in a word, the railway mania in the South Sea. After a time, the shares "hesitated," declined, and fell; and there was an outcry against everybody concerned in the matter, very like the outcry against the *οἱ περὶ* Hudson in our own time. The results, however, were very different. Whatever may be said, and, judging from the late experience, a good deal is likely to be said, as to the advantages of civilisation and education, it seems certain that they tend to diminish a simple-minded energy. The Parliament of 1720 did not, like the Parliament of 1847, allow itself to be bored and incommoded by legal *minutiæ*, nor did it forego the use of plain words. A committee reported the discovery of "a train of the deepest villainy and fraud *hell* ever contrived to ruin a nation"; the directors of the company were arrested, and Mr. Gibbon among the rest; he was compelled to give in a list of his effects: the general wish was that a retrospective act should be immediately passed, which would impose on him penalties something like, or even more severe than, those now enforced on Paul and Strahan. In the end, however, Mr. Gibbon escaped with a parliamentary conversation upon his affairs. His estate amounted to £140,000; and as this was a great sum, there was an obvious suspicion that he was a great criminal. The scene must have been very curious. "Allowances of twenty pounds or one shilling were facetiously voted. A vague report that a director had formerly been concerned in

another project by which some unknown persons had lost their money, was admitted as a proof of his actual guilt. One man was ruined because he had dropped a foolish speech that his horses should feed upon gold; another because he was grown so proud, that one day, at the Treasury, he had refused a civil answer to persons far above him." The vanity of his descendant is evidently a little tried by the peculiar severity with which his grandfather was treated. Out of his £140,000 it was proposed that he should retain only £15,000; and on an amendment even this was reduced to £10,000. Yet there is some ground for believing that the acute energy and practised pecuniary power which had been successful in obtaining so large a fortune, were likewise applied with science to the inferior task of retaining some of it. The historian indeed says: "On these ruins," the £10,000 aforesaid, "with skill and credit of which Parliament had not been able to deprive him, my grandfather erected the edifice of a new fortune: the labours of sixteen years were amply rewarded; and I have reason to believe that the second structure was not much inferior to the first". But this only shows how far a family feeling may bias a sceptical judgment. The credit of a man in Mr. Gibbon's position could not be very lucrative; and his skill must have been enormous to have obtained so much at the end of his life, in such circumstances, in so few years. Had he been an early Christian, the narrative of his descendant would have contained an insidious hint, "that pecuniary property *may* be so secreted as to defy the awkward approaches of political investigation". That he died rich is certain, for two generations lived solely on the property he bequeathed.

The son of this great speculator, the historian's father, was a man to spend a fortune quietly. He is not related to have indulged in any particular expense, and nothing is more difficult to follow than the pecuniary fortunes of deceased families; but one thing is certain, that the property which descended to the historian—making every allowance for all minor and subsidiary modes of diminution, such as daughters' settlements, legacies, and so forth—was enormously less than £140,000; and therefore if those figures are correct, the second

generation must have made itself very happy out of the savings of the past generation, and without caring for the poverty of the next. Nothing that is related of the historian's father indicates a strong judgment or an acute discrimination; and there are some scarcely dubious signs of a rather weak character.

Edward Gibbon, the great, was born on the 27th of April, 1737. Of his mother we hear scarcely anything; and what we do hear is not remarkably favourable. It seems that she was a faint, inoffensive woman, of ordinary capacity, who left a very slight trace of her influence on the character of her son, did little, and died early. The real mother, as he is careful to explain, of his understanding and education was her sister, and his aunt, *Mrs.* Catherine Porten, according to the speech of that age, a maiden lady of much vigour and capacity, and for whom her pupil really seems to have felt as much affection as was consistent with a rather easy and cool nature. There is a panegyric on her in the *Memoirs;* and in a long letter upon the occasion of her death, he deposes: "To her care I am indebted in earliest infancy for the preservation of my life and health. . . . To her instructions I owe the first rudiments of knowledge, the first exercise of reason, and a taste for books, which is still the pleasure and glory of my life; and though she taught me neither language nor science, she was certainly the most useful preceptress I ever had. As I grew up, an intercourse of thirty years endeared her to me as the faithful friend and the agreeable companion. You have observed with what freedom and confidence we lived," etc., etc. To a less sentimental mind, which takes a more tranquil view of aunts and relatives, it is satisfactory to find that somehow he could not write to her. "I wish," he continues, "I had as much to applaud and as little to reproach in my conduct to Mrs. Porten since I left England; and when I reflect that my letter would have soothed and comforted her decline, I feel"—what an ardent nephew would naturally feel at so unprecedented an event. Leaving his maturer years out of the question—a possible rhapsody of affectionate eloquence—she seems to have been of the greatest use to him in infancy. His health was

very imperfect. We hear much of rheumatism, and lameness, and weakness; and he was unable to join in work and play with ordinary boys. He was moved from one school to another, never staying anywhere very long, and owing what knowledge he obtained rather to a strong retentive understanding than to any external stimulants or instruction. At one place he gained an acquaintance with the Latin elements at the price of "many tears and some blood". At last he was consigned to the instruction of an elegant clergyman, the Rev. Philip Francis, who had obtained notoriety by a metrical translation of Horace, the laxity of which is even yet complained of by construing schoolboys, and who, with a somewhat Horatian taste, went to London as often as he could, and translated *invisa negotia* as "boys to beat".

In school-work, therefore, Gibbon had uncommon difficulties and unusual deficiencies; but these were much more than counterbalanced by a habit which often accompanies a sickly childhood, and is the commencement of a studious life, the habit of desultory reading. The instructiveness of this is sometimes not comprehended. S. T. Coleridge used to say that he felt a great superiority over those who had not read—and fondly read—fairy tales in their childhood; he thought they wanted a sense which he possessed, the perception, or apperception—we do not know which he used to say it was—of the unity and wholeness of the universe. As to fairy tales, this is a hard saying; but as to desultory reading, it is certainly true. Some people have known a time in life when there was no book they could not read. The fact of its being a book went immensely in its favour. In early life there is an opinion that the obvious thing to do with a horse is to ride it; with a cake, to eat it; with sixpence, to spend it. A few boys carry this further, and think the natural thing to do with a book is to read it. There is an argument from design in the subject: if the book was not meant for that purpose, for what purpose was it meant? Of course, of any understanding of the works so perused there is no question or idea. There is a legend of Bentham, in his earliest childhood, climbing to the height of a huge stool and sitting there evening

after evening with two candles, engaged in the perusal of Rapin's history. It might as well have been any other book. The doctrine of utility had not then dawned on its immortal teacher; *cui bono* was an idea unknown to him. He would have been ready to read about Egypt, about Spain, about coals in Borneo, the teak-wood in India, the current in the river Mississippi, on natural history or human history, on theology or morals, on the state of the dark ages or the state of the light ages, on Augustulus or Lord Chatham, on the first century or the seventeenth, on the moon, the millennium, or the whole duty of man. Just then, reading is an end in itself. At that time of life you no more think of a future consequence, of the remote, the very remote possibility of deriving knowledge from the perusal of a book, than you expect so great a result from spinning a peg-top. You spin the top, and you read the book; and these scenes of life are exhausted. In such studies, of all prose perhaps the best is history. One page is so like another; battle No. 1 is so much on a par with battle No. 2. Truth may be, as they say, stranger than fiction, abstractedly; but in actual books, novels are certainly odder and more astounding than correct history. It will be said, what is the use of this? Why not leave the reading of great books till a great age? Why plague and perplex childhood with complex facts remote from its experience and inapprehensible by its imagination? The reply is, that though in all great and combined facts there is much which childhood cannot thoroughly imagine, there is also in very many a great deal which can only be truly apprehended for the first time at that age. Catch an American of thirty;—tell him about the battle of Marathon; what will he be able to comprehend of all that you mean by it; of all that halo which early impression and years of remembrance have cast around it? He may add up the killed and wounded, estimate the missing, and take the dimensions of Greece and Athens; but he will not seem to care much. He may say, "Well, sir, perhaps it was a smart thing in that small territory; but it is a long time ago, and in my country James K. Burnup"—did that which he will at length explain to you. Or try an experiment

on yourself. Read the account of a Circassian victory, equal in numbers, in daring, in romance, to the old battle. Will you be able to feel about it at all in the same way? It is impossible. You cannot form a new set of associations; your mind is involved in pressing facts, your memory choked by a thousand details; the liveliness of fancy is gone with the childhood by which it was enlivened. Schamyl will never seem as great as Leonidas, or Miltiades; Cnókemof, or whoever the Russian is, cannot be so imposing as Xerxes; the unpronounceable place cannot strike on your heart like Marathon or Platæa. Moreover, there is the further advantage which Coleridge shadowed forth in the remark we cited. Youth has a principle of consolidation. We begin with the whole. Small sciences are the labours of our manhood; but the round universe is the plaything of the boy. His fresh mind shoots out vaguely and crudely into the infinite and eternal. Nothing is hid from the depth of it; there are no boundaries to its vague and wandering vision. Early science, it has been said, begins in utter nonsense; it would be truer to say that it starts with boyish fancies. How absurd seem the notions of the first Greeks! Who could believe now that air or water was the principle, the pervading substance, the eternal material of all things? Such affairs will never explain a thick rock. And what a white original for a green and sky-blue world! Yet people disputed in those ages not whether it was either of those substances, but which of them it was. And doubtless there was a great deal, at least in quantity, to be said on both sides. Boys are improved; but some in our own day have asked, "Mamma, I say, what did God make the world of?" and several, who did not venture on speech, have had an idea of some one grey primitive thing, felt a difficulty as to how the red came, and wondered that marble could *ever* have been the same as moonshine. This is in truth the picture of life. We begin with the infinite and eternal, which we shall never apprehend; and these form a framework, a schedule, a set of co-ordinates to which we refer all which we learn later. At first, like the old Greek, "we look up to the whole sky, and are lost in the one and the all"; in the

end we classify and enumerate, learn each star, calculate distances, draw cramped diagrams on the unbounded sky, write a paper on *a* Cygni and a treatise on *e* Draconis, map special facts upon the indefinite void, and engrave precise details on the infinite and everlasting. So in history; somehow the whole comes in boyhood; the details later and in manhood. The wonderful series going far back to the times of old patriarchs with their flocks and herds, the keen-eyed Greek, the stately Roman, the watching Jew, the uncouth Goth, the horrid Hun, the settled picture of the unchanging East, the restless shifting of the rapid West, the rise of the cold and classical civilisation, its fall, the rough impetuous middle ages, the vague warm picture of ourselves and home,—when did we learn these? Not yesterday nor to-day; but long ago, in the first dawn of reason, in the original flow of fancy. What we learn afterwards are but the accurate littlenesses of the great topic, the dates and tedious facts. Those who begin late learn only these; but the happy first feel the mystic associations and the progress of the whole.

There is no better illustration of all this than Gibbon. Few have begun early with a more desultory reading, and fewer still have described it so skilfully. "From the ancient I leaped to the modern world; many crude lumps of Speed, Rapin, Mezeray, Davila, Machiavel, Father Paul, Bower, etc., I devoured like so many novels; and I swallowed with the same voracious appetite the description of India and China, of Mexico and Peru. My first introduction to the historic scenes which have since engaged so many years of my life must be ascribed to an accident. In the summer of 1751 I accompanied my father on a visit to Mr. Hoare's, in Wiltshire; but I was less delighted with the beauties of Stourhead than with discovering in the library a common book, the *Continuation of Echard's Roman History*, which is, indeed, executed with more skill and taste than the previous work. To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new; and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. This transient glance served rather

to irritate than to appease my curiosity; and as soon as I returned to Bath I procured the second and third volumes of Howel's *History of the World*, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention; and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Ockley, an original in every sense, first opened my eyes; and I was led from one book to another till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks; and the same ardour urged me to guess at the French of D'Herbelot, and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulfaragius*." To this day the schoolboy student of the *Decline and Fall* feels the traces of that schoolboy reading. *Once*, he is conscious, the author like him felt, and solely felt, the magnificent progress of the great story and the scenic aspect of marvellous events.

A more sudden effect was at hand. However exalted may seem the praises which we have given to loose and unplanned reading, we are not saying that it is the sole ingredient of a good education. Besides this sort of education, which some boys will voluntarily and naturally give themselves, there needs, of course, another and more rigorous kind, which must be impressed upon them from without. The terrible difficulty of early life—the *use* of pastors and masters—really is, that they compel boys to a distinct mastery of that which they do not wish to learn. There is nothing to be said for a preceptor who is not dry. Mr. Carlyle describes with bitter satire the fate of one of his heroes who was obliged to acquire whole systems of information in which he, the hero, saw no use, and which he kept as far as might be in a vacant corner of his mind. And this is the very point—dry language, tedious mathematics, a thumbed grammar, a detested slate, form gradually an interior separate intellect, exact in its information, rigid in its requirements, disciplined in its exercises. The two grow together, the early natural fancy touching the far extremities of the universe, lightly playing with the scheme of all things; the precise, compacted memory slowly accumulat-

ing special facts, exact habits, clear and painful conceptions. At last, as it were in a moment, the clouds break up, the division sweeps away; we find that in fact these exercises which puzzled us, these languages which we hated, these details which we despised, are the instruments of true thought, are the very keys and openings, the exclusive access to the knowledge which we loved.

In this second education the childhood of Gibbon had been very defective. He had never been placed under any rigid training. In his first boyhood he had disputed with his aunt, "that were I master of Greek and Latin, I must interpret to myself in English the thoughts of the original, and that such extemporary versions must be inferior to the elaborate translation of professed scholars: a silly sophism," as he remarks, "which could not easily be confuted by a person ignorant of any other language than her own". Ill-health, a not very wise father, an ill-chosen succession of schools and pedagogues, prevented his acquiring exact knowledge in the regular subjects of study. His own description is the best—"erudition that might have puzzled a doctor, and ignorance of which a schoolboy should have been ashamed". The amiable Mr. Francis, who was to have repaired the deficiency, went to London, and forgot him. With an impulse of discontent his father took a resolution, and sent him to Oxford at sixteen.

It is probable that a worse place could not have been found. The University of Oxford was at the nadir of her history and efficiency. The public professorial training of the middle ages had died away, and the intramural collegiate system of the present time had not begun. The University had ceased to be a teaching body, and had not yet become an examining body. "The professors," says Adam Smith, who had studied there, "have given up almost the pretence of lecturing." "The examination," said a great judge[1] some years later, "was a farce in my time. I was asked who founded University College; and I said, though the fact is now doubted, that King Alfred founded it; and *that* was the examination." The colleges, deprived of the superintendence and watchfulness of

[1] Eldon.

their natural sovereign, fell, as Gibbon remarks, into "port and prejudice". The Fellows were a close corporation; they were chosen from every conceivable motive—because they were respectable men, because they were good fellows, because they were brothers of other Fellows, because their fathers had patronage in the Church. Men so appointed could not be expected to be very diligent in the instruction of youth; many colleges did not even profess it; that of All Souls has continued down to our own time to deny that it has anything to do with it. Undoubtedly a person who came thither accurately and rigidly drilled in technical scholarship found many means and a few motives to pursue it. Some tutorial system probably existed at most colleges. Learning was not wholly useless in the Church. The English gentleman has ever loved a nice and classical scholarship. But these advantages were open only to persons who had received a very strict training, and who were voluntarily disposed to discipline themselves still more. To the mass of mankind the University was a "graduating machine"; the colleges, monopolist residences, —hotels without bells.

Taking the place as it stood, the lot of Gibbon may be thought rather fortunate. He was placed at Magdalen, whose fascinating walks, so beautiful in the later autumn, still recall the name of Addison, the example of the merits, as Gibbon is of the deficiencies, of Oxford. His first tutor was, in his own opinion, "one of the best of the tribe". "Dr. Waldegrave was a learned and pious man, of a mild disposition, strict morals, and abstemious life, who seldom mingled in the politics or the jollity of the college. But his knowledge of the world was confined to the University; his learning was of the last, rather than of the present age; his temper was indolent; his faculties, which were not of the first rate, had been relaxed by the climate; and he was satisfied, like his fellows, with the slight and superficial discharge of an important trust. As soon as my tutor had sounded the insufficiency of his disciple in school-learning, he proposed that we should read every morning from ten to eleven, the comedies of Terence. The sum of my improvement in the University of Oxford is confined to three

or four Latin plays; and even the study of an elegant classic, which might have been illustrated by a comparison of ancient and modern theatres, was reduced to a dry and literal interpretation of the author's text. During the first weeks I constantly attended these lessons in my tutor's room; but as they appeared equally devoid of profit and pleasure, I was once tempted to try the experiment of a formal apology. The apology was accepted with a smile. I repeated the offence with less ceremony; the excuse was admitted with the same indulgence: the slightest motive of laziness or indisposition, the most trifling avocation at home or abroad, was allowed as a worthy impediment; nor did my tutor appear conscious of my absence or neglect. Had the hour of lecture been constantly filled, a single hour was a small portion of my academic leisure. No plan of study was recommended for my use; no exercises were prescribed for his inspection; and at the most precious season of youth, whole days and weeks were suffered to elapse without labour or amusement, without advice or account." The name of his second tutor is concealed in asterisks, and the sensitive conscience of Dean Milman will not allow him to insert a name "which *Gibbon* thought proper to suppress". The account, however, of the anonymous person is sufficiently graphic. "Dr. * * * * well remembered that he had a salary to receive, and only forgot that he had a duty to perform. Instead of guiding the studies and watching over the behaviour of his disciple, I was never summoned to attend even the ceremony of a lecture; and excepting one voluntary visit to his rooms, during the eight months of his titular office the tutor and pupil lived in the same college as strangers to each other." It added to the evils of this neglect, that Gibbon was much younger than most of the students; and that his temper, which was through life reserved, was then very shy. His appearance, too, was odd; "a thin little figure, with a large head, disputing and arguing with the greatest ability". Of course he was a joke among undergraduates; he consulted his tutor as to studying Arabic, and was seen buying *La Bibliothèque Orientale d'Herbelot*, and immediately a legend was diffused that he had turned Mahomedan. The random cast was not

so far from the mark: cut off by peculiarities from the society of young people; deprived of regular tuition and systematic employment; tumbling about among crude masses of heterogeneous knowledge; alone with the heated brain of youth,—he did what an experienced man would expect—he framed a theory of all things. No doubt it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world. Was he to be the butt of ungenial wine-parties, or spend his lonely hours on shreds of languages? Was he not to know the *truth?* There were the old problems, the everlasting difficulties, the *mœnia mundi*, the Hercules' pillars of the human imagination—"fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute".[1] Surely these should come first; when we had learned the great landmarks, understood the guiding-stars, we might amuse ourselves with small points, and make a plaything of curious information. What particular theory the mind frames when in this state is a good deal matter of special accident. The data for considering these difficulties are not within its reach. Whether man be or be not born to solve the "mystery of the knowable," he certainly is not born to solve it at seventeen, with the first hot rush of the untrained mind. The selection of Gibbon was remarkable: he became a Roman Catholic.

It seems now so natural that an Oxford man should take this step, that one can hardly understand the astonishment it created. Lord Sheffield tells us that the Privy Council interfered; and with good administrative judgment examined a London bookseller—some Mr. Lewis—who had no concern in it. In the manor-house of Buriton it would have probably created less sensation if "dear Edward" had announced his intention of becoming a monkey. The English have ever believed that the Papist is a kind of *creature;* and every sound mind would prefer a beloved child to produce a tail, a hide of hair, and a taste for nuts, in comparison with transubstantiation, wax-candles, and a belief in the glories of Mary.

What exact motives impelled Gibbon to this step cannot now be certainly known; the autobiography casts a mist over them; but from what appears, his conversion partly much

[1] "Paradise Lost," book ii.

resembled, and partly altogether differed from, the Oxford conversions of our own time. We hear nothing of the notes of a church, or the sin of the Reformation; and Gibbon had not an opportunity of even rejecting Mr. Sewell's [1] theory that it is "a holy obligation to acquiesce in the opinions of your grandmother". His memoirs have a halo of great names—Bossuet, the *History of Protestant Variations*, etc., etc.—and he speaks with becoming dignity of falling by a noble hand. He mentioned also to Lord Sheffield, as having had a prepondering influence over him, the works of Father Parsons, who lived in Queen Elizabeth's time. But in all probability these were secondary persuasions, justifications after the event. No young man, or scarcely any young man of seventeen, was ever converted by a systematic treatise, especially if written in another age, wearing an obsolete look, speaking a language which scarcely seems that of this world. There is an unconscious reasoning: "The world has had this book before it so long, and has withstood it. There must be something wrong; it seems all right on the surface, but a flaw there must be." The mass of the volumes, too, is unfavourable. "All the treatises in the world," says the young convert in *Loss and Gain*,[2] "are not equal to giving one a view in a moment." What the youthful mind requires is this short decisive argument, this view in a moment, this flash as it were of the understanding, which settles all, and diffuses a conclusive light at once and for ever over the whole. It is so much the pleasanter if the young mind can strike this view out for itself, from materials which are forced upon it from the controversies of the day; if it can find a certain solution of pending questions, and show itself wiser even than the wisest of its own, the very last age. So far as appears, this was the fortune of Gibbon. "It was not long," he says, "since Dr. Middleton's *Free Inquiry* had sounded an alarm in the theological world; much ink and much gall had been spent in defence of the primitive miracles; and the two dullest of their champions were crowned with academic honours by the University of

[1] Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford.

[2] By J. H. Newman, chap. xvii.

Oxford. The name of Middleton was unpopular; and his proscription very naturally led me to peruse his writings and those of his antagonists." It is not difficult to discover in this work easy and striking arguments which might lead an untaught mind to the communion of Rome. As to the peculiar belief of its author, there has been much controversy, with which we have not here the least concern; but the natural conclusion to which it would lead a simple intellect is, that all miracles are equally certain or equally uncertain. "It being agreed, then," says the acute controversialist, "that in the original promise of these miraculous gifts there is no intimation of any particular period to which their continuance was limited, the next question is, by what sort of evidence the precise time of their duration is to be determined? But to this point one of the writers just referred to excuses himself, as we have seen, from giving any answer; and thinks it sufficient to declare in general that *the earliest fathers unanimously affirm them to have continued down to their times*. Yet he has not told us, as he ought to have done, to what age he limits the character of *the earliest fathers;* whether to the second or to the third century, or, with the generality of our writers, he means also to include the fourth. But to whatever age he may restrain it, the difficulty at last will be to assign a reason why he must needs stop there. In the meanwhile, by his appealing thus to the *earliest fathers* only as unanimous on this article, a common reader would be apt to infer that the later fathers are more cold or diffident, or divided upon it; whereas the reverse of this is true, and the more we descend from those earliest fathers the more strong and explicit we find their successors in attesting the perpetual succession and daily exertion of the same miraculous powers in their several ages; so that if the cause must be determined by *the unanimous consent of fathers*, we shall find as much reason to believe that those powers were continued even to the latest ages as to any other, how early and primitive soever, after the days of the apostles. But the same writer gives us two reasons why he does not choose to say anything upon the subject of their duration: 1st, because *there is not light enough in history to*

settle it; 2ndly, because *the thing itself is of no concern to us.* As to his first reason, I am at a loss to conceive what further light a professed advocate of the primitive ages and fathers can possibly require in this case. For as far as the Church historians can illustrate or throw light upon anything, there is not a single point in all history so constantly, explicitly, and unanimously affirmed by them all, as the continual succession of those powers through all ages, from the earliest father who first mentions them down to the time of the Reformation. Which same succession is still further deduced by persons of the most eminent character for their probity, learning, and dignity in the Romish Church, to this very day. So that the only doubt which can remain with us is, whether the Church historians are to be trusted or not; for if any credit be due to them in the present case, it must reach either to all or to none; because the reason of believing them in any one age will be found to be of equal force in all, as far as it depends on the characters of the persons attesting, or the nature of the things attested."[1] In *terms* this and the whole of Middleton's argument is so shaped as to avoid including in its scope the miracles of Scripture, which are mentioned throughout with eulogiums and acquiescence, and so as to make you doubt whether the author believed them or not. This is exactly one of the pretences which the young strong mind delights to tear down. It would argue, "This writer evidently *means* that the apostolic miracles have just as much evidence and no more than the popish or the patristic; and how strong"—for Middleton is a master of telling statement—"he shows that evidence to be! I won't give up the apostolic miracles, I cannot; yet I must believe what has as much of historical testimony in its favour. It is no *reductio ad absurdum* that we must go over to the Church of Rome; it is the most diffused of Christian creeds, the oldest of Christian Churches." And so the logic of the sceptic becomes, as often since, the most efficient instrument of the all-believing and all-determining Church.

The consternation of Gibbon's relatives seems to have been

[1] Preface to *Free Inquiry.*

enormous. They cast about what to do. From the experience of Oxford, they perhaps thought that it would be useless to have recourse to the Anglican clergy; this resource had failed. So they took him to Mr. Mallet, a Deist, to see if he could do anything; but he did nothing. Their next step was nearly as extraordinary. They placed him at Lausanne, in the house of M. Pavilliard, a French Protestant minister. After the easy income, complete independence, and unlimited credit of an English undergraduate, he was thrown into a foreign country, deprived, as he says, by ignorance of the language, both of "speech and hearing,"—in the position of a schoolboy, with a small allowance of pocket-money, and without the Epicurean comforts on which he already set some value. He laments the "indispensable comfort of a servant," and the "sordid and uncleanly table of Madame Pavilliard". In our own day the watchful sagacity of Cardinal Wiseman would hardly allow a promising convert of expectations and talents to remain unsolaced in so pitiful a situation; we should hear soothing offers of flight or succour, some insinuations of a Popish domestic and interesting repasts. But a hundred years ago, the attention of the Holy See was very little directed to our English youth, and Gibbon was left to endure his position.

It is curious that he made himself comfortable. Though destitute of external comforts which he did not despise, he found what was the greatest luxury to his disposition, steady study and regular tuition. His tutor was, of course, to convert him if he could; but as they had no language in common, there was the preliminary occupation of teaching French. During five years both tutor and pupil steadily exerted themselves to repair the defects of a neglected and ill-grounded education. We hear of the perusal of Terence, Virgil, Horace, and Tacitus. Cicero was translated into French, and translated back again into Latin. In both languages the pupil's progress was sound and good. From letters of his which still exist, it is clear that he then acquired the exact and steady knowledge of Latin of which he afterwards made so much use. His circumstances compelled him to master French. If his own letters are to be trusted, he would be an example of his own doctrine, that no

one is thoroughly master of more than one language at a time; they read like the letters of a Frenchman trying and failing to write English. But perhaps there was a desire to magnify his continental progress, and towards the end of the time some wish to make his friends fear he was forgetting his own language.

Meantime the work of conversion was not forgotten. In some letters which are extant, M. Pavilliard celebrates the triumph of his logic. "*J'ai renversé*," says the pastor, "*l'infaillibilité de l'Eglise; j'ai prouvé que jamais Saint Pierre n'a été chef des apôtres; que quand il l'aurait été, le pape n'est point son successeur; qu'il est douteux que Saint Pierre ait jamais été à Rome; mais supposé qu'il y ait été, il n'a pas été évêque de cette ville; que la transubstantiation est une invention humaine, et peu ancienne dans l'Eglise*," and so on through the usual list of Protestant arguments. He magnifies a little Gibbon's strength of conviction, as it makes the success of his own logic seem more splendid; but states two curious things: first, that Gibbon at least *pretended* to believe in the Pretender, and what is more amazing still—all but incredible—that he fasted. Such was the youth of the Epicurean historian!

It is probable, however, that the skill of the Swiss pastor was not the really operating cause of the event. Perhaps experience shows that the converts which Rome has made, with the threat of unbelief and the weapons of the sceptic, have rarely been permanent or advantageous to her. It is at best but a dangerous logic to drive men to the edge and precipice of scepticism, in the hope that they will recoil in horror to the very interior of credulity. Possibly men may show their courage—they may vanquish the *argumentum ad terrorem*—they may not find scepticism so terrible. This last was Gibbon's case. A more insidious adversary than the Swiss theology was at hand to sap his Roman Catholic belief. Pavilliard had a fair French library—not ill stored in the recent publications of that age—of which he allowed his pupil the continual use. It was as impossible to open any of them and not come in contact with infidelity, as to come to England and not to see a green

field. Scepticism is not so much a part of the French literature of that day as its animating spirit—its essence, its vitality. You can no more cut it out and separate it, than you can extract from Wordsworth his conception of nature, or from Swift his common-sense. And it is of the subtlest kind. It has little in common with the rough disputation of the English deist, or the perplexing learning of the German theologian, but works with a tool more insinuating than either. It is, in truth, but the spirit of the world, which does not argue, but assumes; which does not so much elaborate, as hints; which does not examine, but suggests. With the traditions of the Church it contrasts traditions of its own; its technicalities are *bon sens, l'usage du monde, le fanatisme, l'enthousiasme;* to high hopes, noble sacrifices, awful lives, it opposes quiet ease, skilful comfort, placid sense, polished indifference. Old as transubstantiation may be, it is not older than Horace and Lucian. Lord Byron, in the well-known lines, has coupled the names of the two literary exiles on the Leman Lake. The page of Voltaire could not but remind Gibbon that the scepticism from which he had revolted was compatible with literary eminence and European fame—gave a piquancy to ordinary writing—was the very expression of caustic caution and gentlemanly calm.

The grave and erudite habits of Gibbon soon developed themselves. Independently of these abstruse theological disputations, he spent many hours daily—rising early and reading carefully—on classical and secular learning. He was not, however, wholly thus engrossed. There was in the neighbourhood of Lausanne a certain Mademoiselle Curchod, to whom he devoted some of his time. She seems to have been a morbidly rational lady; at least she had a grave taste. Gibbon could not have been a very enlivening lover; he was decidedly plain, and his predominating taste was for solid learning. But this was not all; she formed an attachment to M. Necker, afterwards the most slow of premiers, whose financial treatises can hardly have been agreeable even to a Genevese beauty. This was, however, at a later time. So far as appears, Gibbon was her first love. How extreme her feelings were one does not

know. Those of Gibbon can scarcely be supposed to have done him any harm. However, there was an intimacy, a flirtation, an engagement—when, as usual, it appeared that neither had any money. That the young lady should procure any seems to have been out of the question; and Gibbon, supposing that he might, wrote to his father. The reply was unfavourable. Gibbon's mother was dead; Mr. Gibbon senior was married again; and even in other circumstances would have been scarcely ready to encourage a romantic engagement to a lady with nothing. She spoke no English, too, and marriage with a person speaking only French is still regarded as a most unnatural event; forbidden, not indeed by the literal law of the Church, but by those higher instinctive principles of our nature, to which the bluntest own obedience. No father could be expected to violate at once pecuniary duties and patriotic principles. Mr. Gibbon senior forbade the match. The young lady does not seem to have been quite ready to relinquish all hope; but she had shown a grave taste, and fixed her affections on a sound and cold mind. "I sighed," narrates the historian, "as a lover; but I obeyed as a son." "I have seen," says M. Suard, "the letter in which Gibbon communicated to Mademoiselle Curchod the opposition of his father to their marriage. The first pages are tender and melancholy, as might be expected from an unhappy lover; the latter become by degrees calm and reasonable; and the letter concludes with these words: *C'est pourquoi, mademoiselle, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre très-humble et très-obéissant serviteur, Edward Gibbon.*" Her father died soon afterwards, and "she retired to Geneva, where, by teaching young ladies, she earned a hard subsistence for herself and her mother; but the tranquil disposition of her admirer preserved him from any romantic display of sympathy and fidelity. He continued to study various readings in Cicero, as well as the passage of Hannibal over the Alps; and with those affectionate resources set sentiment at defiance. Yet thirty years later the lady, then the wife of the most conspicuous man in Europe, was able to suggest useful reflections to an aged bachelor, slightly dreaming of a superannuated marriage: "*Gardez-vous, monsieur, de former un de ces liens tardifs: le mariage qui*

rend heureux dans l'âge mûr, c'est celui qui fut contracté dans la jeunesse. Alors seulement la réunion est parfaite, les goûts se communiquent, les sentimens se répandent, les idées deviennent communes, les facultés intellectuelles se modèlent mutuellement. Toute la vie est double, et toute la vie est une prolongation de la jeunesse; car les impressions de l'âme commandent aux yeux, et la beauté qui n'est plus conserve encore son empire; mais pour vous, monsieur, dans toute la vigueur de la pensée, lorsque toute l'existence est décidée, l'on ne pourroit sans un miracle trouver une femme digne de vous; et une association d'un genre imparfait rappelle toujours la statue d'Horace, qui joint à une belle tête le corps d'un stupide poisson. Vous êtes marié avec la gloire." She was then a cultivated French lady, giving an account of the reception of the *Decline and Fall* at Paris, and expressing rather peculiar ideas on the style of Tacitus. The world had come round to her side, and she explains to her old lover rather well her happiness with M. Necker.

After living nearly five years at Lausanne, Gibbon returned to England. Continental residence has made a great alteration in many Englishmen; but few have undergone so complete a metamorphosis as Edward Gibbon. He left his own country a hot-brained and ill-taught youth, willing to sacrifice friends and expectations for a superstitious and half-known creed; he returned a cold and accomplished man, master of many accurate ideas, little likely to hazard any coin for any faith: already, it is probable, inclined in secret to a cautious scepticism; placing thereby, as it were, upon a system the frigid prudence and unventuring incredulity congenial to his character. His change of character changed his position among his relatives. His father, he says, met him as a friend; and they continued thenceforth on a footing of "easy intimacy". Especially after the little affair of Mademoiselle Curchod, and the "very sensible view he took in that instance of the matrimonial relation," there can be little question that Gibbon was justly regarded as a most safe young man, singularly prone to large books, and a little too fond of French phrases and French ideas; and yet with a great feeling of common-sense, and a wise preference of permanent money to transitory sentiment.

His father allowed him a moderate, and but a moderate, income, which he husbanded with great care, and only voluntarily expended in the purchase and acquisition of serious volumes. He lived an externally idle but really studious life, varied by tours in France and Italy; the toils of which, though not in description very formidable, a trifle tried a sedentary habit and somewhat corpulent body. The only English avocation which he engaged in was, oddly enough, war. It does not appear the most likely in this pacific country, nor does he seem exactly the man for *la grande guerre;* but so it was; and the fact is an example of a really Anglican invention. The English have discovered pacific war. We may not be able to kill people as well as the French, or fit out and feed distant armaments as neatly as they do; but we are unrivalled at a quiet armament here at home which never kills anybody, and never wants to be sent anywhere. A "constitutional militia" is a beautiful example of the mild efficacy of civilisation, which can convert even the "great manslaying profession" (as Carlyle calls it) into a quiet and dining association. Into this force Gibbon was admitted; and immediately, contrary to his anticipations, and very much against his will, was called out for permanent duty. The hero of the corps was a certain dining Sir Thomas, who used at the end of each new bottle to announce with increasing joy how much soberer he had become. What his fellow-officers thought of Gibbon's French predilections and large volumes it is not difficult to conjecture; and he complains bitterly of the interruption to his studies. However, his easy composed nature soon made itself at home; his polished tact partially concealed from the "mess" his recondite pursuits, and he contrived to make the Hampshire armament of classical utility. "I read," he says, "the Analysis of Cæsar's Campaign in Africa. Every motion of that great general is laid open with a critical sagacity. A complete military history of his campaigns would do almost as much honour to M. Guichardt as to Cæsar. This finished the *Mémoires*, which gave me a much clearer notion of ancient tactics than I ever had before. Indeed, my own military knowledge was of some service to me, as I am well acquainted

with the modern discipline and exercise of a battalion. So that though much inferior to M. Folard and M. Guichardt, who had seen service, I am a much better judge than Salmasius, Casaubon, or Lipsius; mere scholars, who perhaps had never seen a battalion under arms."[1]

The real occupation of Gibbon, as this quotation might suggest, was his reading; and this was of a peculiar sort. There are many kinds of readers, and each has a sort of perusal suitable to his kind. There is the voracious reader, like Dr. Johnson, who extracts with grasping appetite the large features, the mere essence of a trembling publication, and rejects the rest with contempt and disregard. There is the subtle reader, who pursues with fine attention the most imperceptible and delicate ramifications of an interesting topic, marks slight traits, notes changing manners, has a keen eye for the character of his author, is minutely attentive to every prejudice and awake to every passion, watches syllables and waits on words, is alive to the light air of nice associations which float about every subject—the motes in the bright sunbeam—the delicate gradations of the passing shadows. There is the stupid reader, who prefers dull books—is generally to be known by his disregard of small books and English books, but likes masses in modern Latin, *Grævius de torpore mirabili; Horrificus de gravitate sapientiæ.* But Gibbon was not of any of these classes. He was what common people would call a matter-of-fact, and philosophers now-a-days a *positive* reader. No disciple of M. Comte could attend more strictly to precise and provable phenomena. His favourite points are those which can be weighed and measured. Like the dull reader, he had perhaps a preference for huge books in unknown tongues; but, on the other hand, he wished those books to contain real and accurate information. He liked the firm earth of positive knowledge. His fancy was not flexible enough for exquisite refinement, his imagination too slow for light and wandering literature; but he felt no love of dulness in itself, and had a prompt acumen for serious eloquence. This was his kind of reflection. "The author of the Ad-

[1] *Journal*, 23rd May, 1762.

venturer, No. 127 (Mr. Joseph Warton, concealed under the signature of Z), concludes his ingenious parallel of the ancients and moderns by the following remark: 'That age will never again return, when a Pericles, after walking with Plato in a portico built by Phidias and painted by Apelles, might repair to hear a pleading of Demosthenes or a tragedy of Sophocles'. It will never return, because it never existed. Pericles (who died in the fourth year of the LXXXIXth Olympiad. ant. Ch. 429, Dio. Sic. l. xii. 46) was confessedly the patron of Phidias, and the contemporary of Sophocles; but he could enjoy no very great pleasure in the conversation of Plato, who was born in the same year that he himself died (Diogenes Laertius in Platone, *v.* Stanley's *History of Philosophy*, p. 154). The error is still more extraordinary with regard to Apelles and Demosthenes, since both the painter and the orator survived Alexander the Great, whose death is above a century posterior to that of Pericles (in 323). And indeed, though Athens was the seat of every liberal art from the days of Themistocles to those of Demetrius Phalereus, yet no particular era will afford Mr. Warton the complete synchronism he seems to wish for; as tragedy was deprived of her famous triumvirate before the arts of philosophy and eloquence had attained the perfection which they soon after received at the hands of Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes."[1]

And wonderful is it for what Mr. Hallam calls the "languid students of our present age" to turn over the journal of his daily studies. It is true, it seems to have been revised by himself; and so great a narrator would group effectively facts with which he was so familiar; but allowing any discount (if we may use so mean a word) for the skilful art of the impressive historian, there will yet remain in the *Extraits de mon Journal* a wonderful monument of learned industry. You may open them anywhere. "*Dissertation on the Medal of Smyrna*, by M. de Boze: replete with erudition and taste; containing curious researches on the

[1] This passage is to be found only in Lord Sheffield's five-volume edition of the *Miscellanies* (1814), being No. 30 of the *Index Expurgatorius* (vol. v.); the so-called "reprint" of 1837 omits this and other matter. (Forrest Morgan.)

pre-eminence of the cities of Asia.—*Researches on the Polypus*, by Mr. Trembley. A new world: throwing light on physics, but darkening metaphysics.—Vegetius's *Institutions*. This writer on tactics has good general notions; but his particular account of the Roman discipline is deformed by confusion and anachronisms."[1] Or, "I this day began a very considerable task, which was to read Cluverius' *Italia Antiqua*, in two volumes folio, Leyden, 1624, Elzevirs";[2] and it appears he did read it as well as begin it, which is the point where most enterprising men would have failed. From the time of his residence at Lausanne his Latin scholarship had been sound and good, and his studies were directed to the illustration of the best Roman authors; but it is curious to find on 16th August, 1761, after his return to England, and when he was twenty-four years old, the following extract: "I have at last finished the *Iliad*. As I undertook it to improve myself in the Greek language, which I had totally neglected for some years past, and to which I never applied myself with a proper attention, I must give a reason why I began with Homer, and that contrary to Le Clerc's advice. I had two: 1st, As Homer is the most ancient Greek author (excepting perhaps Hesiod) who is now extant; and as he was not only the poet, but the lawgiver, the theologian, the historian, and the philosopher of the ancients, every succeeding writer is full of quotations from, or allusions to his writings, which it would be difficult to understand without a previous knowledge of them. In this situation, was it not natural to follow the ancients themselves, who always began their studies by the perusal of Homer? 2ndly, No writer ever treated such a variety of subjects. As every part of civil, military, or economical life is introduced into his poems, and as the simplicity of his age allowed him to call everything by its proper name, almost the whole compass of the Greek tongue is comprised in Homer. I have so far met with the success I hoped for, that I have acquired a great facility in reading the language, and treasured up a very great stock of words. What I have rather neglected is, the grammatical construction of them, and especially the many

[1] 5th December, 1762. [2] 13th October, 1762.

various inflexions of the verbs. In order to acquire that dry but necessary branch of knowledge, I propose bestowing some time every morning on the perusal of the *Greek Grammar of Port Royal*, as one of the best extant. I believe that I read nearly one-half of Homer like a mere schoolboy, not enough master of the words to elevate myself to the poetry. The remainder I read with a good deal of care and criticism, and made many observations on them. Some I have inserted here; for the rest I shall find a proper place. Upon the whole, I think that Homer's few faults (for some he certainly has) are lost in the variety of his beauties. I expected to have finished him long before. The delay was owing partly to the circumstances of my way of life and avocations, and partly to my own fault; for while every one looks on me as a prodigy of application, I know myself how strong a propensity I have to indolence." Posterity will confirm the contemporary theory that he was a "prodigy" of steady study. Those who know what the Greek language is, how much of the *Decline and Fall* depends on Greek authorities, how few errors the keen criticism of divines and scholars has been able to detect in his employment of them, will best appreciate the patient everyday labour which could alone repair the early neglect of so difficult an attainment.

It is odd how little Gibbon wrote, at least for the public, in early life. More than twenty-two years elapsed from his first return from Lausanne to the appearance of the first volume of his great work, and in that long interval his only important publication, if it can indeed be so called, was a French essay, *Sur l'Etude de la Littérature*, which contains some sensible remarks, and shows much regular reading; but which is on the whole a "conceivable treatise," and would be wholly forgotten if it had been written by any one else. It was little read in England, and must have been a serious difficulty to his friends in the militia; but the Parisians read it, or said they had read it, which is more in their way, and the fame of being a French author was a great aid to him in foreign society. It flattered, indeed, the French *literati* more than any one can now fancy. The French had then the idea that it was uncivil-

ised to speak any other language, and the notion of *writing* any other seemed quite a *bêtise*. By a miserable misfortune you might not know French, but at least you could conceal it assiduously; white paper anyhow might go unsoiled; posterity at least should not hear of such ignorance. The Parisian was to be the universal tongue. And it did not seem absurd, especially to those only slightly acquainted with foreign countries, that this might in part be so. Political eminence had given their language a diplomatic supremacy. No German literature existed as yet; Italy had ceased to produce important books. There was only England left to dispute the literary omnipotence; and such an attempt as Gibbon's was a peculiarly acceptable flattery, for it implied that her most cultivated men were beginning to abandon their own tongue, and to write like other nations in the cosmopolitan *lingua franca*. A few far-seeing observers, however, already contemplated the train of events which at the present day give such a preponderating influence to our own writers, and make it an arduous matter even to explain the conceivableness of the French ambition. Of all men living then or since, David Hume was the most likely from prejudice and habit to take an unfavourable view of English literary influence; he had more literary fame than he deserved in France, and less in England; he had much of the French neatness, he had but little of the English nature; yet his cold and discriminating intellect at once emancipated him from the sophistries which imposed on those less watchful. He wrote to Gibbon: "I have only one objection, derived from the language in which it is written. Why do you compose in French, and carry faggots into the wood, as Horace says with regard to Romans who wrote in Greek? I grant that you have a like motive to those Romans, and adopt a language much more generally diffused than your native tongue; but have you not remarked the fate of those two ancient languages in the following ages? The Latin, though then less celebrated and confined to more narrow limits, has in some measure outlived the Greek, and is now more generally understood by men of letters. Let the French, therefore, triumph in the present diffusion of their tongue. Our solid and increasing establish-

ments in America, where we need less dread the inundation of barbarians, promise a superior stability and duration to the English language."[1] The cool sceptic was correct. The great breeding people have gone out and multiplied; colonies in every clime attest our success; French is the *patois* of Europe; English is the language of the world.

Gibbon took the advice of his sagacious friend, and prepared himself for the composition of his great work in English. His studies were destined, however, to undergo an interruption. "Yesterday morning," he wrote to a friend, "about half an hour after seven, as I was destroying an army of barbarians, I heard a double rap at the door, and my friend Mr. Eliot was soon introduced. After some idle conversation, he told me that if I was desirous of being in Parliament, he had an independent seat very much at my service." The borough was Liskeard; and the epithet independent is, of course, ironical, Mr. Eliot being himself the constituency of that place. The offer was accepted, and one of the most learned of members of Parliament took his seat.

The political life of Gibbon is briefly described. He was a supporter of Lord North. That well-known statesman was, in the most exact sense, a representative man,—although representative of the class of persons most out of favour with the transcendental thinkers who invented this name. Germans deny it, but in every country common opinions are very common. Everywhere, there exists the comfortable mass; quiet, sagacious, short-sighted,—such as the Jews whom Rabshakeh tempted by their vine and their fig-tree; such as the English with their snug dining-room and after-dinner nap, domestic happiness and Bullo coal; sensible, solid men, without stretching irritable reason, but with a placid, supine instinct; without originality and without folly; judicious in their dealings, respected in the world; wanting little, sacrificing nothing; good-tempered people in a word, "caring for nothing until they are themselves hurt". Lord North was one of this class. You could hardly make him angry. "No doubt," he said, tapping his fat sides, "I am that odious thing a minister; and I

[1] 24th October, 1767. Given in note to the *Memoirs*.

believe other people wish they were so too." Profound people look deeply for the maxims of his policy; and these being on the surface, of course they fail to find them. He did, not what the mind, but what the *body* of the community wanted to have done; he appealed to the real people, the large English commonplace herd. His abilities were great; and with them he did what people with no abilities wished to do, and could not do. Lord Brougham has published the King's Letters to him, showing that which partial extracts had made known before, that Lord North was quite opposed to the war he was carrying on; was convinced it could not succeed; hardly, in fact, wished it might. Why did he carry it on? *Vox populi*, the voice of well-dressed men commanded it to be done; and he cheerfully sacrificed American people, who were nothing to him, to English, who were something, and a king, who was much. Gibbon was the very man to support such a ruler. His historical writings have given him a posthumous eminence; but in his own time he was doubtless thought a sensible safe man, of ordinary thoughts and intelligible actions. To do him justice, he did not pretend to be a hero. "You know," he wrote to his friend Deyverdun, "*que je suis entré au parlement sans patriotisme, sans ambition, et que toutes mes vues se bornoient à la place commode et honnête d'un* lord of trade." "Wise in his generation" was written on his brow. He quietly and gently supported the policy of his time.

Even, however, amid the fatigue of parliamentary attendance—the fatigue, in fact, of attending a nocturnal and oratorical club, where you met the best people, who could not speak, as well as a few of the worst, who *would*—Gibbon's history made much progress. The first volume, a quarto, one-sixth of the whole, was published in the spring of 1776, and at once raised his fame to a high point. Ladies actually read it—read about Bœtica and Tarraconensis, the Roman legions and the tribunitian powers. Grave scholars wrote dreary commendations. "The first impression," he writes, "was exhausted in a few days; a second and a third edition were scarcely adequate to the demand; and my bookseller's

property was twice invaded by the pirates of Dublin. My book was on every table"—tables must have been rather few in that age—"and almost on every toilette; the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day; nor was the general voice disturbed by the barking of any profound critic." The noise penetrated deep into the unlearned classes. Mr. Sheridan, who never read anything "on principle," said that the crimes of Warren Hastings surpassed anything to be found in the "correct sentences of Tacitus or the *luminous* page of Gibbon".[1] Some one seems to have been struck with the jet of learning, and questioned the great wit. "I said," he replied, "*vo*luminous".

History, it is said, is of no use; at least a great critic, who is understood to have in the press a very elaborate work in that kind,[2] not long since seemed to allege that writings of this sort did not establish a theory of the universe, and were therefore of no avail. But whatever may be the use of this sort of composition in itself and abstractedly, it is certainly of great use relatively and to literary men. Consider the position of a man of that species. He sits beside a library-fire, with nice white paper, a good pen, a capital style, every means of saying everything, but nothing to say; of course he is an able man; of course he has an active intellect, beside wonderful culture; but still one cannot always have original ideas. Every day cannot be an era; a train of new speculation very often will not be found; and how dull it is to make it your business to write, to stay by yourself in a room to write, and then to have nothing to say! It is dreary work mending seven pens, and waiting for a theory to "turn up". What a gain if something would happen! then one could describe it. Something has happened, and that something is history. On this account, since a sedate Greek discovered this plan for a grave immortality, a series of accomplished men have seldom been found wanting to derive a literary capital from their active and barbarous kindred. Perhaps when a Visigoth broke a head,

[1] Speech on the trial.

[2] Probably Carlyle and his *Frederick the Great* are meant.

he thought that that was all. Not so; he was making history; Gibbon has written it down.

The manner of writing history is as characteristic of the narrator as the actions are of the persons who are related to have performed them; often much more so. It may be generally defined as a view of one age taken by another; a picture of a series of men and women painted by one of another series. Of course, this definition seems to exclude contemporary history; but if we look into the matter carefully, is there such a thing? What are all the best and most noted works that claim the title—memoirs, scraps, materials—composed by men of like passions with the people they speak of, involved it may be in the same events, describing them with the partiality and narrowness of eager actors; or even worse, by men far apart in a monkish solitude, familiar with the lettuces of the convent-garden, but hearing only faint dim murmurs of the great transactions which they slowly jot down in the barren chronicle; these are not to be named in the same short breath, or included in the same narrow word, with the equable, poised, philosophic narrative of the retrospective historian. In the great histories there are two topics of interest—the man as a type of the age in which he lives,—the events and manners of the age he is describing; very often almost all the interest is the contrast of the two.

You should do everything, said Lord Chesterfield, in minuet time. It was in that time that Gibbon wrote his history, and such was the manner of the age. You fancy him in a suit of flowered velvet, with a bag and sword, wisely smiling, composedly rounding his periods. You seem to see the grave bows, the formal politeness, the finished deference. You perceive the minuetic action accompanying the words "Give," it would say, "Augustus a chair: Zenobia, the humblest of your slaves: Odoacer, permit me to correct the defect in your attire". As the slap-dash sentences of a rushing critic express the hasty impatience of modern manners; so the deliberate emphasis, the slow acumen, the steady argument, the impressive narration bring before us what is now a tradition, the picture of the correct eighteenth-century gentleman, who never failed in a

measured politeness, partly because it was due in propriety towards others, and partly because from his own dignity it was due most obviously to himself.

And not only is this true of style, but it may be extended to other things also. There is no one of the many literary works produced in the eighteenth century more thoroughly characteristic of it than Gibbon's history. The special characteristic of that age is its clinging to the definite and palpable; it had a taste beyond everything for what is called solid information. In literature the period may be defined as that in which authors had ceased to write for students, and had not begun to write for women. In the present day, no one can take up any book intended for general circulation, without clearly seeing that the writer supposes most of his readers will be ladies or young men; and that in proportion to his judgment he is attending to their taste. Two or three hundred years ago books were written for professed and systematic students,—the class the Fellows of colleges were designed to be,—who used to go on studying them all their lives. Between these there was a time in which the more marked class of literary consumers were strong-headed, practical men. Education had not become so general, or so feminine, as to make the present style—what is called the "brilliant style"—at all necessary; but there was enough culture to make the demand of common diffused persons more effectual than that of special and secluded scholars. A book-buying public had arisen of sensible men, who would not endure the awful folio style in which the schoolmen wrote. From peculiar causes, too, the business of that age was perhaps more free from the hurry and distraction which disable so many of our practical men now from reading. You accordingly see in the books of the last century what is called a masculine tone; a firm, strong, perspicuous narration of matter of fact, a plain argument, a contempt for everything which distinct definite people cannot entirely and thoroughly comprehend. There is no more solid book in the world than Gibbon's history. Only consider the chronology. It begins before the year ONE and goes down to the year 1453, and is a schedule or series of schedules of im-

portant events during that time. Scarcely any fact deeply affecting European civilisation is wholly passed over, and the great majority of facts are elaborately recounted. Laws, dynasties, churches, barbarians, appear and disappear. Everything changes; the old world—the classical civilisation of form and definition—passes away, a new world of free spirit and inward growth emerges; between the two lies a mixed weltering interval of trouble and confusion, when everybody hates everybody, and the historical student leads a life of skirmishes, is oppressed with broils and feuds. All through this long period Gibbon's history goes with steady consistent pace; like a Roman legion through a troubled country—*hæret pede pes;* up hill and down hill, through marsh and thicket, through Goth or Parthian—the firm, defined array passes forward—a type of order, and an emblem of civilisation. Whatever may be the defects of Gibbon's history, none can deny him a proud precision and a style in marching order.

Another characteristic of the eighteenth century is its taste for dignified pageantry. What an existence was that of Versailles! How gravely admirable to see the *grand monarque* shaved, and dressed, and powdered; to look on and watch a great man carefully amusing himself with dreary trifles. Or do we not even now possess an invention of that age—the great eighteenth-century footman, still in the costume of his era, with dignity and powder, vast calves and noble mien? What a world it must have been when all men looked like that! Go and gaze with rapture at the footboard of a carriage, and say, Who would not obey a premier with such an air? Grave, tranquil, decorous pageantry is a part, as it were, of the essence of the last age. There is nothing more characteristic of Gibbon. A kind of pomp pervades him. He is never out of livery. He ever selects for narration those themes which look most like a levee: grave chamberlains seem to stand throughout; life is a vast ceremony, the historian at once the dignitary and the scribe.

The very language of Gibbon shows these qualities. Its majestic march has been the admiration, its rather pompous cadence the sport, of all perusers. It has the greatest merit

of an historical style: it is always going on; you feel no doubt of its continuing in motion. Many narrators of the reflective class, Sir Archibald Alison for example, fail in this: your constant feeling is, "Ah! he has pulled up; he is going to be profound; he never will go on again". Gibbon's reflections connect the events; they are not sermons between them. But, notwithstanding, the manner of the *Decline and Fall* is the last which should be recommended for strict imitation. It is not a style in which you can tell the truth. A monotonous writer is suited only to monotonous matter. Truth is of various kinds—grave, solemn, dignified, petty, low, ordinary; and an historian who has to tell the truth must be able to tell what is vulgar as well as what is great, what is little as well as what is amazing. Gibbon is at fault here. He *cannot* mention Asia *Minor*. The petty order of sublunary matters; the common gross existence of ordinary people; the necessary littlenesses of necessary life, are little suited to his sublime narrative. Men on the *Times* feel this acutely; it is most difficult at first to say many things in the huge imperial manner. And after all you cannot tell everything. "How, sir," asked a reviewer of Sydney Smith's life, "do you say a 'good fellow' in print?" "Mr. ——," replied the editor, "you should not say it at all." Gibbon was aware of this rule: he omits what does not suit him; and the consequence is, that though he has selected the most various of historical topics, he scarcely gives you an idea of variety. The ages change, but the varnish of the narration is the same.

It is not unconnected with this fault that Gibbon gives us but an indifferent description of individual character. People seem a good deal alike. The cautious scepticism of his cold intellect, which disinclined him to every extreme, depreciates great virtues and extenuates vices; and we are left with a tame neutral character, capable of nothing extraordinary, —hateful, as the saying is, "both to God and to the enemies of God".

A great point in favour of Gibbon is the existence of his history. Some great historians seem likely to fail here. A good judge was asked which he preferred, Macaulay's *History*

of England or Lord Mahon's. "Why," he replied, "you observe Lord Mahon has written his history; and by what I see Macaulay's will be written not only for, but *among* posterity." Practical people have little idea of the practical ability required to write a large book, and especially a large history. Long before you get to the pen, there is an immensity of pure business; heaps of material are strewn everywhere; but they lie in disorder, unread, uncatalogued, unknown. It seems a dreary waste of life to be analysing, indexing, extracting words and passages, in which one per cent. of the contents are interesting, and not half of that percentage will after all appear in the flowing narrative. As an accountant takes up a bankrupt's books filled with confused statements of ephemeral events, the disorderly record of unprofitable speculations, and charges this to that head, and that to this,—estimates earnings, specifies expenses, demonstrates failures; so the great narrator, going over the scattered annalists of extinct ages, groups and divides, notes and combines, until from a crude mass of darkened fragments, there emerges a clear narrative, a concise account of the result and upshot of the whole. In this art Gibbon was a master. The laborious research of German scholarship, the keen eye of theological zeal, a steady criticism of eighty years, have found few faults of detail. The account has been worked right, the proper authorities consulted, an accurate judgment formed, the most telling incidents selected. Perhaps experience shows that there is something English in this talent. The Germans are more elaborate in single monographs; but they seem to want the business ability to work out a complicated narrative, to combine a long whole. The French are neat enough, and their style is very quick; but then it is difficult to believe their facts; the account on its face seems too plain, and no true Parisian ever was an antiquary. The great classical histories published in this country in our own time show that the talent is by no means extinct; and they likewise show, what is also evident, that this kind of composition is easier with respect to ancient than with respect

to modern times. The barbarians burned the books; and though all the historians abuse them for it, it is quite evident that in their hearts they are greatly rejoiced. If the books had existed, they would have had to read them. Macaulay has to peruse every book printed with long ſs; and it is no use after all; somebody will find some stupid MS., an old account-book of an "ingenious gentleman," and with five entries therein destroy a whole hypothesis. But Gibbon was exempt from this; he could count the books the efficient Goths bequeathed; and when he had mastered them he might pause. Still, it was no light matter, as any one who looks at the books—awful folios in the grave Bodleian—will most certainly credit and believe. And he did it all himself; he never showed his book to any friend, or asked any one to help him in the accumulating work, not even in the correction of the press. "Not a sheet," he says, "has been seen by any human eyes, excepting those of the author and printer; the faults and the merits are exclusively my own." And he wrote most of it with one pen, which must certainly have grown erudite towards the end.

The nature of his authorities clearly shows what the nature of Gibbon's work is. History may be roughly divided into universal and particular; the first being the narrative of events affecting the whole human race, at least the main historical nations, the narrative of whose fortunes is the story of civilisation; and the latter being the relation of events relating to one or a few particular nations only. Universal history, it is evident, comprises great areas of space and long periods of time; you cannot have a series of events visibly operating on all great nations without time for their gradual operation, and without tracking them in succession through the various regions of their power. There is no instantaneous transmission in historical causation; a long interval is required for universal effects. It follows, that universal history necessarily partakes of the character of a summary. You cannot recount the cumbrous annals of long epochs without condensation, selection, and omission; the narrative, when shortened within the needful

limits, becomes concise and general. What it gains in time, according to the mechanical phrase, it loses in power. The particular history, confined within narrow limits, can show us the whole contents of these limits, explain its features of human interest, recount in graphic detail all its interesting transactions, touch the human heart with the power of passion, instruct the mind with patient instances of accurate wisdom. The universal is confined to a dry enumeration of superficial transactions; no action can have all its details; the canvas is so crowded that no figure has room to display itself effectively. From the nature of the subject, Gibbon's history is of the latter class; the sweep of the narrative is so wide; the decline and fall of the Roman Empire being in some sense the most universal event which has ever happened,—being, that is, the historical incident which most affected all civilised men, and the very existence and form of civilisation itself,—it is evident that we must look rather for a comprehensive generality than a telling minuteness of delineation. The history of a thousand years does not admit the pictorial detail which a Scott or a Macaulay can accumulate on the history of a hundred. Gibbon has done his best to avoid the dryness natural to such an attempt. He inserts as much detail as his limits will permit; selects for more full description striking people and striking transactions; brings together at a single view all that relates to single topics; above all, by a regular advance of narration, never ceases to imply the regular progress of events and the steady course of time. None can deny the magnitude of such an effort. After all, however, these are merits of what is technically termed composition, and are analogous to those excellences in painting or sculpture that are more respected by artists than appreciated by the public at large. The fame of Gibbon is highest among writers; those especially who have studied for years particular periods included in his theme (and how many those are; for in the East and West he has set his mark on all that is great for ten centuries!) acutely feel and admiringly observe how difficult it would be to say so much, and leave so little un-

touched; to compress so many telling points; to present in so few words so apt and embracing a narrative of the whole. But the mere unsophisticated reader scarcely appreciates this; he is rather awed than delighted; or rather, perhaps, he appreciates it for a little while, then is tired by the roll and glare; then, on any chance—the creaking of an organ, or the stirring of a mouse—in time of temptation he falls away. It has been said, the way to answer all objections to Milton is to take down the book and read him; the way to reverence Gibbon is not to read him at all, but look at him, from outside, in the bookcase, and think how much there is within; what a course of events, what a muster-roll of names, what a steady, solemn sound! You will not like to take the book down; but you will think how much you could be delighted if you would.

It may be well, though it can be only in the most cursory manner, to examine the respective treatment of the various elements in this vast whole. The *History of the Decline and Fall* may be roughly and imperfectly divided into the picture of the Roman Empire—the narrative of barbarian incursions —the story of Constantinople: and some few words may be hastily said on each.

The picture—for so, from its apparent stability when contrasted with the fluctuating character of the later period, we may call it—which Gibbon has drawn of the united empire has immense merit. The organisation of the imperial system is admirably dwelt on; the manner in which the old republican institutions were apparently retained, but really altered, is compendiously explained; the mode in which the imperial will was transmitted to and carried out in remote provinces is distinctly displayed. But though the mechanism is admirably delineated, the dynamical principle, the original impulse is not made clear. You never feel you are reading about the Romans. Yet no one denies their character to be most marked. Poets and orators have striven for the expression of it.

Macaulay has been similarly criticised; it has been said, that notwithstanding his great dramatic power, and wonderful felicity in the selection of events on which to exert it, he yet

never makes us feel that we are reading about Englishmen. The coarse clay of our English nature *cannot* be represented in so fine a style. In the same way, and to a much greater extent (for this is perhaps an unthankful criticism, if we compare Macaulay's description of any body with that of any other historian), Gibbon is chargeable with neither expressing nor feeling the essence of the people concerning whom he is writing. There was, in truth, in the Roman people a warlike fanaticism, a puritanical essence, an interior, latent, restrained, enthusiastic religion, which was utterly alien to the cold scepticism of the narrator. Of course he was conscious of it. He indistinctly felt that at least there was something he did not like; but he could not realise or sympathise with it without a change of heart and nature. The old pagan has a sympathy with the religion of enthusiasm far above the reach of the modern Epicurean.

It may indeed be said, on behalf of Gibbon, that the old Roman character was in its decay, and that only such slight traces of it were remaining in the age of Augustus and the Antonines, that it is no particular defect in him to leave it unnoticed. Yet, though the intensity of its nobler peculiarities was on the wane, many a vestige would perhaps have been apparent to so learned an eye, if his temperament and disposition had been prone to seize upon and search for them. Nor is there any adequate appreciation of the compensating element, of the force which really held society together, of the fresh air of the Illyrian hills, of that army which, evermore recruited from northern and rugged populations, doubtless brought into the very centre of a degraded society the healthy simplicity of a vital, if barbarous religion.

It is no wonder that such a mind should have looked with displeasure on primitive Christianity. The whole of his treatment of that topic has been discussed by many pens, and three generations of ecclesiastical scholars have illustrated it with their emendations. Yet, if we turn over this, the latest and most elaborate edition, containing all the important criticisms of Milman and of Guizot, we shall be surprised to find how few instances of definite exact error such a scrutiny has been

able to find out. As Paley, with his strong sagacity, at once remarked, the subtle error rather lies hid in the sinuous folds than is directly apparent on the surface of the polished style. Who, said the shrewd archdeacon, can refute a sneer? And yet even this is scarcely the exact truth. The objection of Gibbon is, in fact, an objection rather to religion than to Christianity; as has been said, he did not appreciate, and could not describe, the most inward form of pagan piety; he objected to Christianity because it was the intensest of religions. We do not mean by this to charge Gibbon with any denial of, any overt distinct disbelief in, the existence of a supernatural Being. This would be very unjust; his cold composed mind had nothing in common with the Jacobinical outbreak of the next generation. He was no doubt a theist after the fashion of natural theology; nor was he devoid of more than scientific feeling. All constituted authorities struck him with emotion, all ancient ones with awe. If the Roman Empire had descended to his time, how much he would have reverenced it! He had doubtless a great respect for the "First Cause"; it had many titles to approbation; "it was not conspicuous," he would have said, "but it was potent". A sensitive decorum revolted from the jar of atheistic disputation. We have already described him more than enough. A sensible middle-aged man in political life; a bachelor, not himself gay, but living with gay men; equable and secular; cautious in his habits, tolerant in his creed, as Porson said, "never failing in natural feeling, except when women were to be ravished and Christians to be martyred". His writings are in character. The essence of the far-famed fifteenth and sixteenth chapters is, in truth, but a description of unworldly events in the tone of this world, of awful facts in unmoved voice, of truths of the heart in the language of the eyes. The wary sceptic has not even committed himself to definite doubts. These celebrated chapters were in the first manuscript much longer, and were gradually reduced to their present size by excision and compression. Who can doubt that in their first form they were a clear, or comparatively clear, expression of exact opinions on the Christian history, and that it was by a subsequent and elaborate

process that they were reduced to their present and insidious obscurity? The toil has been effectual. "Divest," says Dean Milman of the introduction to the fifteenth chapter, "this whole passage of the latent sarcasm betrayed by the whole of the subsequent dissertation, and it might commence a Christian history, written in the most Christian spirit of candour."[1]

It is not for us here to go into any disquisition as to the comparative influence of the five earthly causes, to whose secondary operation the specious historian ascribes the progress of Christianity. Weariness and disinclination forbid. There can be no question that the polity of the Church, and the zeal of the converts, and other such things, did most materially conduce to the progress of the Gospel. But few will now attribute to these much of the effect. The real cause is the heaving of the mind after the truth. Troubled with the perplexities of time, weary with the vexation of ages, the spiritual faculty of man turns to the truth as the child turns to its mother. The thirst of the soul was to be satisfied, the deep torture of the spirit to have rest. There was an appeal to those—

> "High instincts, before which our mortal nature
> Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised".[2]

The mind of man has an appetite for the truth.

> "Hence, in a season of calm weather,
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,—
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."[3]

All this was not exactly in Gibbon's way, and he does not seem to have been able to conceive that it was in any one else's. Why his chapters had given offence he could hardly make out. It actually seems that he hardly thought that other people believed more than he did. "We may be well assured," says he,

[1] Preface to his edition of the *Decline and Fall.*
[2] Wordsworth: "Intimations of Immortality," ix.
[3] *Ibid.*

of a sceptic of antiquity, "that a writer conversant with the world would never have ventured to expose the gods of his country to public ridicule, had they not been already the objects of secret contempt among the polished and enlightened orders of society."[1] "Had I," he says of himself, "believed that the majority of English readers were so fondly attached even to the name and shadow of Christianity, had I foreseen that the pious, the timid, and the prudent would feel, or would affect to feel, with such exquisite sensibility,—I might perhaps have softened the two invidious chapters, which would create many enemies and conciliate few friends."[2] The state of belief at that time is a very large subject; but it is probable that in the cultivated cosmopolitan classes the continental scepticism was very rife; that among the hard-headed classes the rough spirit of English Deism had made progress. Though the mass of the people doubtless believed much as they now believe, yet the entire upper class was lazy and corrupt, and there is truth in the picture of the modern divine: "The thermometer of the Church of England sunk to its lowest point in the first thirty years of the reign of George III. . . . In their preaching, nineteen clergymen out of twenty carefully abstained from dwelling upon Christian doctrines. Such topics exposed the preacher to the charge of fanaticism. Even the calm and sober Crabbe, who certainly never erred from excess of zeal, was stigmatised in those days as a Methodist, because he introduced into his sermons the notion of future reward and punishment. An orthodox clergyman (they said) should be content to show his people the worldly advantage of good conduct, and to leave heaven and hell to the ranters. Nor can we wonder that such should have been the notions of country parsons, when, even by those who passed for the supreme arbiters of orthodoxy and taste, the vapid rhetoric of Blair was thought the highest standard of Christian exhortation."[3] It is among the excuses for Gibbon that he lived in such a world.

There are slight palliations also in the notions then

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. ii., *in re* Lucian. [2] *Memoirs*.

[3] "Church Parties," *Edinburgh Review* for October, 1853; by W. J. Conybeare.

prevalent of the primitive Church. There was the Anglican theory, that it was a *via media*, the most correct of periods, that its belief is to be the standard, its institutions the model, its practice the test of subsequent ages. There was the notion, not formally drawn out, but diffused through and implied in a hundred books of evidence—a notion in opposition to every probability, and utterly at variance with the new Testament—that the first converts were sober, hard-headed, cultivated inquirers,—Watsons, Paleys, Priestleys, on a small scale; weighing evidence, analysing facts, suggesting doubts, dwelling on distinctions, cold in their dispositions, moderate in their morals, —cautious in their creed. We now know that these were not they of whom the world was not worthy. It is ascertained that the times of the first Church were times of excitement; that great ideas falling on a mingled world were distorted by an untrained intellect, even in the moment in which they were received by a yearning heart; that strange confused beliefs, Millennarianism, Gnosticism, Ebionitism, were accepted, not merely by outlying obscure heretics, but in a measure, half-and-half, one notion more by one man, another more by his neighbour, confusedly and mixedly by the mass of Christians; that the appeal was not to the questioning, thinking understanding, but to unheeding, all-venturing emotion; to that lower class "from whom faiths ascend," and not to the cultivated and exquisite class by whom they are criticised; that fervid men never embraced a more exclusive creed. You can say nothing favourable of the first Christians, except that they *were* Christians. We find no "form nor comeliness" in them; no intellectual accomplishments, no caution in action, no discretion in understanding. There is no admirable quality except that, with whatever distortion, or confusion, or singularity, they at once accepted the great clear outline of belief in which to this day we live, move, and have our being. The offence of Gibbon is his disinclination to this simple essence; his excuse, the historical errors then prevalent as to the primitive Christians, the real defects so natural in their position, the false merits ascribed to them by writers who from one reason or another desired to treat them as "an authority".

On the whole, therefore, it may be said of the first, and in some sense the most important, part of Gibbon's work, that though he has given an elaborate outline of the framework of society, and described its detail with pomp and accuracy, yet that he has not comprehended or delineated its nobler essence, pagan or Christian. Nor perhaps was it to be expected that he should, for he inadequately comprehended the dangers of the time; he thought it the happiest period the world has ever known; he would not have comprehended the remark: "To see the old world in its worst estate we turn to the age of the satirist and of Tacitus, when all the different streams of evil coming from east, west, north, south, the vices of barbarism and the vices of civilisation, remnants of ancient cults and the latest refinements of luxury and impurity, met and mingled on the banks of the Tiber. What could have been the state of society when Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Heliogabalus, were the rulers of the world? To a good man we should imagine that death itself would be more tolerable than the sight of such things coming upon the earth."[1] So deep an ethical sensibility was not to be expected in the first century; nor is it strange when, after seventeen hundred years, we do not find it in their historian.

Space has failed us, and we must be unmeaningly brief. The second head of Gibbon's history—the narrative of the barbarian invasions—has been recently criticised, on the ground that he scarcely enough explains the gradual but unceasing and inevitable manner in which the outer barbarians were affected by and assimilated to the civilisation of Rome. Mr. Congreve[2] has well observed, that the impression which Gibbon's narrative is insensibly calculated to convey is, that there was little or no change in the state of the Germanic tribes between the time of Tacitus and the final invasion of the empire—a conclusion which is obviously incredible. To the general reader there will perhaps seem some indistinctness in this part of the work, nor is a free, confused barbarism a con-

[1] Jowett: "Epistles of St. Paul, chap. i. of Romans," *State of the Ancient World.*

[2] *Lectures on the Roman Empire of the West.*

genial subject for an imposing and orderly pencil. He succeeds better in the delineation of the riding monarchies, if we may so term them,—of the equestrian courts of Attila or Timour, in which the great scale, the concentrated power, the very enormity of the barbarism, give, so to speak, a shape to unshapeliness; impart, that is, a horrid dignity to horse-flesh and mare's milk, an imposing oneness to the vast materials of a crude barbarity. It is needless to say that no one would search Gibbon for an explanation of the reasons or feelings by which the northern tribes were induced to accept Christianity.

It is on the story of Constantinople that the popularity of Gibbon rests. The vast extent of the topic; the many splendid episodes it contains; its epic unity from the moment of the far-seeing selection of the city by Constantine to its last fall; its position as a link between Europe and Asia; its continuous history; the knowledge that through all that time it was, as now, a diadem by the water-side, a lure to be snatched by the wistful barbarian, a marvel to the West, a prize for the North and for the East;—these, and such as these ideas, are congenial topics to a style of pomp and grandeur. The East seems to require to be treated with a magnificence unsuitable to a colder soil. The nature of the events, too, is suitable to Gibbon's cursory, imposing manner. It is the history of a form of civilisation, but without the power thereof; a show of splendour and vigour, but without bold life or interior reality. What an opportunity for an historian who loved the imposing pageantry and disliked the purer essence of existence! There were here neither bluff barbarians nor simple saints; there was nothing admitting of particular accumulated detail; we do not wish to know the interior of the stage; the imposing movements are all which should be seized. Some of the features, too, are curious in relation to those of the historian's life: the clear accounts of the theological controversies, followed out with an appreciative minuteness so rare in a sceptic, are not disconnected with his early conversion to the scholastic Church; the brilliancy of the narrative reminds us of his enthusiasm for Arabic and the East; the minute description of a licentious epoch evinces the

habit of a mind which, not being bold enough for the practice of licence, took a pleasure in following its theory. There is no subject which combines so much of unity with so much of variety.

It is evident, therefore, where Gibbon's rank as an historian must finally stand. He cannot be numbered among the great painters of human nature, for he has no sympathy with the heart and passions of our race; he has no place among the felicitous describers of detailed life, for his subject was too vast for minute painting, and his style too uniform for a shifting scene. But he is entitled to a high—perhaps to a first place—among the orderly narrators of great events; the composed expositors of universal history; the tranquil artists who have endeavoured to diffuse a cold polish over the warm passions and desultory fortunes of mankind.

The life of Gibbon after the publication of his great work was not very complicated. During its composition he had withdrawn from Parliament and London to the studious retirement of Lausanne. Much eloquence has been expended on this voluntary exile, and it has been ascribed to the best and most profound motives. It is indeed certain that he liked a lettered solitude, preferred easy continental society, was not quite insensible to the charm of scenery, had a pleasure in returning to the haunts of his youth. Prosaic and pure history, however, must explain that he went abroad to *save*. Lord North had gone out of power. Mr. Burke, the Cobden of that era, had procured the abolition of the Lords of Trade; the private income of Gibbon was not equal to his notion of a bachelor London life. The same sum was, however, a fortune at Lausanne. Most things, he acknowledged, were as dear; but then he had not to buy so many things. Eight hundred a year placed him high in the social scale of the place. The inhabitants were gratified that a man of European reputation had selected their out-of-the-way town for the shrine of his fame; he lived pleasantly and easily among easy, pleasant people; a gentle hum of local admiration gradually arose, which yet lingers on the lips of erudite *laquais de place*. He still retains a fame unaccorded to any other

historian; they speak of the "hôtel Gibbon": there never was even an *estaminet* Tacitus, or a *café* Thucydides.

This agreeable scene, like many other agreeable scenes, was broken by a great thunderclap. The French revolution has disgusted many people; but perhaps it has never disgusted any one more than Gibbon. He had swept and garnished everything about him. Externally he had made a neat little hermitage in a gentle, social place; internally he had polished up a still theory of life, sufficient for the guidance of a cold and polished man. Everything seemed to be tranquil with him; the rigid must admit his decorum; the lax would not accuse him of rigour; he was of the world, and an elegant society naturally loved its own. On a sudden the hermitage was disturbed. No place was too calm for that excitement; scarcely any too distant for that uproar. The French war was a war of opinion, entering households, disturbing villages, dividing quiet friends. The Swiss took some of the infection. There was a not unnatural discord between the people of the Pays de Vaud and their masters the people of Berne. The letters of Gibbon are filled with invectives on the "Gallic barbarians" and panegyrics on Mr. Burke; military details, too, begin to abound—the peace of his retirement was at an end. It was an additional aggravation that the Parisians should do such things. It would not have seemed unnatural that northern barbarians—English, or other uncivilised nations—should break forth in rough riot or cruel license; but that the people of the most civilised of all capitals, speaking the sole dialect of polished life, enlightened with all the enlightenment then known, should be guilty of excesses unparalleled, unwitnessed, unheard of, was a vexing trial to one who had admired them for many years. The internal creed and belief of Gibbon was as much attacked by all this as were his external circumstances. He had spent his time, his life, his energy, in putting a polished gloss on human tumult, a sneering gloss on human piety; on a sudden human passion broke forth—the cold and polished world seemed to meet its end; the thin superficies of civilisation was torn asunder; the fountains of the great deep seemed opened;

impiety to meet its end; the foundations of the earth were out of course.

We now, after long familiarity and in much ignorance, can hardly read the history of those years without horror: what an effect must they have produced on those whose minds were fresh, and who knew the people killed! "Never," Gibbon wrote to an English nobleman, "did a revolution affect to such a degree the private existence of such numbers of the first people of a great country. Your examples of misery I could easily match with similar examples in this country and neighbourhood, and our sympathy is the deeper, as we do not possess, like you, the means of alleviating in some measure the misfortunes of the fugitives."[1] It violently affected his views of English politics. He before had a tendency, in consideration of his cosmopolitan cultivation, to treat them as local littlenesses, parish squabbles; but now his interest was keen and eager. "But," he says, "in this rage against slavery, in the numerous petitions against the slave-trade, was there no leaven of new democratical principles? no wild ideas of the rights and natural equality of man? It is these I fear. Some articles in newspapers, some pamphlets of the year, the Jockey Club, have fallen into my hands. I do not infer much from such publications; yet I have never known them of so black and malignant a cast. I shuddered at Grey's motion; disliked the half-support of Fox, admired the firmness of Pitt's declaration, and excused the usual intemperance of Burke. Surely such men as ——, ——, ——, have talents for mischief. I see a club of reform which contains some respectable names. Inform me of the professions, the principles, the plans, the resources of these reformers. Will they heat the minds of the people? Does the French democracy gain no ground? Will the bulk of your party stand firm to their own interest and that of their country? Will you not take some active measures to declare your sound opinions, and separate yourselves from your rotten members? If you allow them to perplex Government, if you trifle with this solemn business, if you do not

[1] To Lord Sheffield, 10th November, 1792.

resist the spirit of innovation in the first attempt, if you admit the smallest and most specious change in our parliamentary system, you are lost. You will be driven from one step to another; from principles just in theory to consequences most pernicious in practice; and your first concession will be productive of every subsequent mischief, for which you will be answerable to your country and to posterity. Do not suffer yourselves to be lulled into a false security; remember the proud fabric of the French monarchy. Not four years ago it stood founded, as it might seem, on the rock of time, force, and opinion; supported by the triple aristocracy of the Church, the nobility, and the Parliaments. They are crumbled into dust; they are vanished from the earth. If this tremendous warning has no effect on the men of property in England; if it does not open every eye, and raise every arm,—you will deserve your fate. If I am too precipitate, enlighten; if I am too desponding, encourage me. My pen has run into this argument; for, as much a foreigner as you think me, on this momentous subject I feel myself an Englishman."[1]

The truth clearly is, that he had arrived at the conclusion that he was the sort of person a populace kill. People wonder a great deal why very many of the victims of the French revolution were particularly selected; the Marquis de Custine, especially, cannot divine why they executed *his* father. The historians cannot show that they committed any particular crimes; the marquises and marchionesses seem very inoffensive. The fact evidently is, that they were killed for being polite. The world felt itself unworthy of them. There were so many bows, such regular smiles, such calm superior condescension,—could a mob be asked to endure it? Have we not all known a precise, formal, patronising old gentleman—bland, imposing, something like Gibbon? Have we not suffered from his dignified attentions? If *we* had been on the Committee of Public Safety, can we doubt what would have been the fate of that man? Just so wrath and envy destroyed in France an upper-class world.

[1] To Lord Sheffield, 30th May, 1792.

After his return to England, Gibbon did not do much or live long. He completed his *Memoirs*, the most imposing of domestic narratives, the model of dignified detail. As we said before, if the Roman Empire *had* written about itself, this was how it would have done so. He planned some other works, but executed none; judiciously observing that building castles in the air was more agreeable than building them on the ground. His career was, however, drawing to an end. Earthly dignity had its limits, even the dignity of an historian. He had long been stout; and now symptoms of dropsy began to appear. After a short interval, he died on the 16th of January,-1794. We have sketched his character, and have no more to say. After all, what is our criticism worth? It only fulfils his aspiration, "that a hundred years hence I may still continue to be abused".[1]

[1] *Memoirs.*

THE CHARACTER OF SIR ROBERT PEEL.[1]

(1856.)

MOST people have looked over old letters. They have been struck with the change of life, with the doubt on things now certain, the belief in things now incredible, the oblivion of what now seems most important, the strained attention to departed detail, which characterise the mouldering leaves. Something like this is the feeling with which we read Sir Robert Peel's *Memoirs*. Who now doubts on the Catholic Question? It is no longer a "question". A younger generation has come into vigorous, perhaps into insolent, life, who regard the doubts that were formerly entertained as absurd, pernicious, delusive. To revive the controversy was an error. The accusations which are brought against a public man in his own age are rarely those echoed in after times. Posterity sees less or sees more. A few points stand forth in distinct rigidity; there is no idea of the countless accumulation, the collision of action, the web of human feeling, with which, in the day of their life, they were encompassed. Time changes much. The points of controversy seem clear; the assumed premises uncertain. The difficulty is to comprehend "the difficulty". Sir Robert Peel will have to answer to posterity, not for having passed Catholic emancipation when he did, but for having opposed it before; not for having been precipitate, but for having been slow; not for having taken "insufficient securities" for the Irish Protestant Church, but for

[1] *Memoirs*, by the Right Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart., M.P., etc. Published by the trustees of his papers, Lord Mahon (now Lord Stanhope) and the Right Hon. Edward Cardwell, M.P. Part I. "The Roman Catholic Question," 1828-9.

having endeavoured to take security for an institution too unjust to be secured by laws or lawgivers.

This memoir has, however, a deeper aim. Its end is rather personal than national. It is designed to show, not that Sir Robert did what was externally expedient—this was probably too plain—but that he himself really believed what he did to be right. The scene is laid not in Ireland, not in the county of Clare, not amid the gross triumphs of O'Connell, or the outrageous bogs of Tipperary; but in the Home Office, among files of papers, among the most correctly docketed memoranda, beside the minute which shows that Justice A. should be dismissed, that Malefactor O. ought not to be reprieved. It is labelled "My Conscience," and is designed to show that "my conscience" was sincere.

Seriously, and apart from jesting, this is no light matter. Not only does the great space which Sir Robert Peel occupied during many years in the history of the country entitle his character to the anxious attention of historical critics, but the very nature of that character itself, its traits, its deficiencies, its merits, are so congenial to the tendencies of our time and government, that to be unjust to him is to be unjust to all probable statesmen. We design to show concisely how this is.

A constitutional statesman is in general a man of common opinions and uncommon abilities. The reason is obvious. When we speak of a free government, we mean a government in which the sovereign power is divided, in which a single decision is not absolute, where argument has an office. The essence of the *gouvernement des avocats*, as the Emperor Nicholas called it, is that you must persuade so many persons. The appeal is not to the solitary decision of a single statesman; not to Richelieu or Nesselrode alone in his closet; but to the jangled mass of men, with a thousand pursuits, a thousand interests, a thousand various habits. Public opinion, as it is said, rules; and public opinion is the opinion of the average man. Fox used to say of Burke: "Burke is a wise man; but he is wise too soon". The average man will not bear this. He is a cool, common person, with a considerate

air, with figures in his mind, with his own business to attend to, with a set of ordinary opinions arising from and suited to ordinary life. He can't bear novelty or originalities. He says: "Sir, I never heard such a thing *before* in my life"; and he thinks this is a *reductio ad absurdum*. You may see his taste by the reading of which he approves. Is there a more splendid monument of talent and industry than *The Times?* No wonder that the average man—that any one—believes in it. As Carlyle observes: "Let the highest intellect able to write epics try to write such a leader for the morning newspapers, it cannot do it; the highest intellect will fail". But did you ever see anything there you had never seen before? Out of the million articles that everybody has read, can any one person trace a single marked idea to a single article? Where are the deep theories, and the wise axioms, and the everlasting sentiments which the writers of the most influential publication in the world have been the first to communicate to an ignorant species? Such writers are far too shrewd. The two million, or whatever number of copies it may be, they publish, are not purchased because the buyers wish to know new truth. The purchaser desires an article which he can appreciate at sight; which he can lay down and say, "An excellent article, very excellent; exactly my own sentiments". Original theories give trouble; besides, a grave man on the Coal Exchange does not desire to be an apostle of novelties among the contemporaneous dealers in fuel;—he wants to be provided with remarks he can make on the topics of the day which will not be known *not* to be his; that are not too profound; which he can fancy the paper only reminded him of. And just in the same way, precisely as the most popular political paper is not that which is abstractedly the best or most instructive, but that which most exactly takes up the minds of men where it finds them, catches the floating sentiment of society, puts it in such a form as society can fancy would convince another society which did not believe—so the most influential of constitutional statesmen is the one who most felicitously expresses the creed of the moment, who administers it, who embodies it in laws and

institutions, who gives it the highest life it is capable of, who induces the average man to think, "I could not have done it any better if I had had time myself".

It might be said, that this is only one of the results of that tyranny of commonplace which seems to accompany civilisation. You may talk of the tyranny of Nero and Tiberius; but the real tyranny is the tyranny of your next-door neighbour. What law is so cruel as the law of doing what he does? What yoke is so galling as the necessity of being like him? What *espionage* of despotism comes to your door so effectually as the eye of the man who lives at your door? Public opinion is a permeating influence, and it exacts obedience to itself; it requires us to think other men's thoughts, to speak other men's words, to follow other men's habits. Of course, if we do not, no formal ban issues, no corporeal pain, no coarse penalty of a barbarous society is inflicted on the offender; but we are called "eccentric"; there is a gentle murmur of "most unfortunate ideas," "singular young man," "well-intentioned, I dare say; but unsafe, sir, quite unsafe". The prudent, of course, conform. The place of nearly everybody depends on the opinion of every one else. There is nothing like Swift's precept to attain the repute of a sensible man, "Be of the opinion of the person with whom, at the time, you are conversing". This world is given to those whom this world can trust. Our very conversation is infected. Where are now the bold humour, the explicit statement, the grasping dogmatism of former days? They have departed, and you read in the orthodox works dreary regrets that the *art* of conversation has passed away. It would be as reasonable to expect the art of walking to pass away. People talk well enough when they know to whom they are speaking. We might even say that the art of conversation was improved by an application to new circumstances. "Secrete your intellect, use common words, say what you are expected to say," and you shall be at peace. The secret of prosperity in common life is to be commonplace on principle.

Whatever truth there may be in these splenetic observations might be expected to show itself more particularly in the world

of politics. People dread to be thought unsafe in proportion as they get their living by being thought to be safe. "Literary men," it has been said, "are outcasts"; and they are eminent in a certain way notwithstanding. "They can say strong things of their age; for no one expects they will go out and act on them." They are a kind of ticket-of-leave lunatics, from whom no harm is for the moment expected; who seem quiet, but on whose vagaries a practical public must have its eye. For statesmen it is different—they must be thought men of judgment. The most morbidly agricultural counties were aggrieved when Mr. Disraeli was made Chancellor of the Exchequer. They could not believe he was a man of solidity; and they could not comprehend taxes by the author of *Coningsby*, or sums by an adherent of the Caucasus. "There is," said Sir Walter Scott, "a certain hypocrisy of action, which, however it is despised by persons intrinsically excellent, will nevertheless be cultivated by those who desire the good repute of men." Politicians, as has been said, live in the repute of the commonalty. They may appeal to posterity; but of what use is posterity? Years before that tribunal comes into life, your life will be extinct. It is like a moth going into Chancery. Those who desire a public career must look to the views of the living public; an immediate exterior influence is essential to the exertion of their faculties. The confidence of others is your *fulcrum*. You cannot, many people wish you could, go into parliament to represent yourself. You must conform to the opinions of the electors; and they, depend on it, will not be original. In a word, as has been most wisely observed, "under free institutions it is necessary occasionally to defer to the opinions of other people; and as other people are obviously in the wrong, this is a great hindrance to the improvement of our political system and the progress of our species".

Seriously, it is a calamity that this is so. Occasions arise in which a different sort of statesman is required. A year or two ago we had one of these. If any politician had come forward in this country, on the topic of the war, with prepared intelligence, distinct views, strong will, commanding mastery, it would have brought support to anxious intellects, and comfort

to a thousand homes. None such came. Our people would have statesmen who thought as they thought, believed as they believed, acted as they would have acted. They had desired to see their own will executed. There came a time when they had no clear will, no definite opinion. They reaped as they had sown. As they had selected an administrative tool, of course it did not turn out a heroic leader.

If we wanted to choose an illustration of these remarks out of all the world, it would be Sir Robert Peel. No man has come so near our definition of a constitutional statesman—the powers of a first-rate man and the creed of a second-rate man. From a certain peculiarity of intellect and fortune, he was never in advance of his time. Of almost all the great measures with which his name is associated, he attained great eminence as an opponent before he attained even greater eminence as their advocate. On the corn-laws, on the currency, on the amelioration of the criminal code, on Catholic emancipation—the subject of the memoir before us—he was not one of the earliest labourers or quickest converts. He did not bear the burden and heat of the day; other men laboured, and he entered into their labours. As long as these questions remained the property of first-class intellects, as long as they were confined to philanthropists or speculators, as long as they were only advocated by austere, intangible Whigs, Sir Robert Peel was against them. So soon as these same measures, by the progress of time, the striving of understanding, the conversion of receptive minds, became the property of second-class intellects, Sir Robert Peel became possessed of them also. He was converted at the conversion of the average man. His creed was, as it had ever been, ordinary; but his extraordinary abilities never showed themselves so much. He forthwith wrote his name on each of those questions, so that it will be remembered as long as they are remembered.

Nor is it merely on these few measures that Sir Robert Peel's mind must undoubtedly have undergone a change. The lifetime of few Englishmen has been more exactly commensurate with a change of public opinion—a total revolution of political thought. Hardly any fact in history is so incredible

as that forty and a few years ago England was ruled by Mr. Perceval. It seems almost the same as being ruled by the *Record* newspaper. He had the same poorness of thought, the same petty Conservatism, the same dark and narrow superstition. His quibbling mode of oratory seems to have been scarcely agreeable to his friends; his impotence in political speculation moves the wrath—destroys the patience—of the quietest reader now. Other ministers have had great connections, or great estates, to compensate for the contractedness of their minds. Mr. Perceval was only a poorish *nisi prius* lawyer; and there is no kind of human being so disagreeable, so teasing, to the gross Tory nature. He is not entitled to any glory for our warlike successes: on the contrary, he did his best to obtain failure by starving the Duke of Wellington, and plaguing him with petty vexations. His views in religion inclined to that Sabbatarian superstition which is of all creeds the most alien to the firm and genial English nature. The mere fact of such a premier being endured shows how deeply the whole national spirit and interest was absorbed in the contest with Napoleon, how little we understood the sort of man who should regulate its conduct—"in the crisis of Europe," as Sydney Smith said, "he safely brought the Curates' Salaries Improvement Bill to a hearing"—and it still more shows the horror of all innovation which the recent events of French history had impressed on our wealthy and comfortable classes. They were afraid of catching revolution, as old women of catching cold. Sir Archibald Alison to this day holds that revolution is an infectious disease, beginning no one knows how, and going no one knows where. There is but one rule of escape, explains the great historian, "Stay still, don't move; do what you have been accustomed to do, and consult your grandmother on everything". In 1812 the English people were all persuaded of this theory. Mr. Perceval was the most narrow-minded and unaltering man they could find: he therefore represented their spirit, and they put him at the head of the state.

Such was the state of political questions. How little of real thoughtfulness was then applied to what we now call social questions cannot be better illustrated than by the pro-

ceedings on the occasion of Mr. Perceval's death. Bellingham, who killed him, was, whether punishable or not, as clearly insane as a lunatic can be who offends against the laws of his country. He had no idea of killing Mr. Perceval particularly. His only idea was, that he had lost some property in Russia; that the English government would never repay him his loss in Russia; and he endeavoured to find some cabinet minister to shoot as a compensation. Lord Eldon lived under the belief that he had nearly been the victim himself, and told some story of a borrowed hat and an assistant's greatcoat to which he ascribed his preservation. The whole affair was a monomaniac's delusion. Bellingham had no ground for expecting any repayment. There was no reason for ascribing his pecuniary ruin to the government of that day, any more than to the government of this day. Indeed, if he had been alive now, it would have been agreed that he was a particularly estimable man. Medical gentlemen would have been examined for days on the doctrine of "irresistible impulse," "moral insanity," "instinctive pistol discharges," and every respectful sympathy would have been shown to so curious an offender. Whether he was punishable or not may be a question; but all will now agree, that it was not a case for the punishment of death. In that day there was no more doubt that he ought to be hanged, than there would now be that he ought on no account to be hanged. The serious reasons, of which the scientific theories above alluded to are but the exaggerated resemblance, which indicate the horrible cruelty of inflicting on those who do not know what they do the extreme penalty of suffering meant for those who perpetrate the worst they can conceive, are in these years so familiar that we can hardly conceive their being unknown. Yet the Tory historian[1] has to regret "that the motion, so earnestly insisted on by his counsel, to have the trial postponed for some days, to obtain evidence to establish his insanity, was not acceded to; that a judicial proceeding, requiring beyond all others the most calm and deliberate consideration, should have been hurried over with a precipitation which,

[1] Alison.

if not illegal, was at least unusual"; and a noble lord "improved" the moment of the assassination by exclaiming to the peers in opposition, "You see, my lords, the consequence of your agitating the question of *Catholic emancipation*". To those who now know England, it seems scarcely possible that this could have occurred here only forty-four years since. It was in such a world that Sir Robert Peel commenced his career. He was Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time of Mr. Perceval's assassination.

It is not, however, to be imagined that, even if Mr. Perceval had lived, his power would have very long endured. It passed to milder and quieter men. It passed to such men as Lord Liverpool and Mr. Peel. The ruling power at that time in England, as for many years before, as even in some measure, though far less, now, was the class of aristocratic gentry; by which we do not mean to denote only the aristocracy, and do not mean to exclude the aristocracy, but to indicate the great class of hereditary landed proprietors, who are in sympathy with the House of Lords on cardinal points, yet breathe a somewhat freer air, are more readily acted on by the opinion of the community, more contradictable by the lower herd, and less removed from their prejudices by a refined and regulated education. From the time of the Revolution, more or less, this has been the ruling class of the community; the close-borough system and the county system giving them mainly the control of the House of Commons, and their feeling being in general, as it were, a mean term between those of the higher nobility and the trading public of what were then the few large towns. The rule of the House of Lords was rather mediate than direct. By those various means of influence and social patronage and oppression which are familiar to a wealthy and high-bred aristocracy, the highest members of it, of course, did exercise over all below them a sure and continual influence; it worked silently and commonly on ordinary questions and in quiet times; yet it was liable to be overborne by a harsher and ruder power when stormy passions arose, in the days of wars and tumults. So far as the actual selection of visible rulers

goes, the largest amount of administrative power has rarely been in the hands of the highest aristocracy, and in a great measure for a peculiar reason: that aristocracy rarely will do the work, and rarely can do the work. The enormous pressure of daily-growing business which besets the governors of a busy and complicated community, is too much for the refined habits, delicate discrimination, anxious judgment, which the course of their life develops in the highest classes, and with which it nourishes the idolence natural to those who have this world to enjoy. The real strain of the necessary labour has generally been borne by men of a somewhat lower grade, trained by an early ambition, a native aptitude, a hardy competition, to perform its copious tasks. Such men are partakers of two benefits. They are rough and ready enough to accomplish the coarse, enormous daily work; they have lived with men of higher rank enough to know and feel what such persons think and want. Sir Robert Walpole is the type of this class. He was a Norfolk squire, and not a nobleman; he was bred a gentleman, and yet was quite coarse enough for any business: his career was what you would expect. For very many years he administered the government much as the aristocracy wished and desired. *They* were, so to speak, the directors of the company which is called the English nation; they met a little and talked a little; but Sir Robert was the manager, who knew all the facts, came every day, saw everybody, and was everything.

Passing over the time of Lord Liverpool, of whom this is not now the place to speak, some such destiny as this would, in his first political life, have appeared likely to be that of Sir Robert Peel. If an acute master of the betting art had been asked the "favourite" statesman who was likely to rule in that generation, he would undoubtedly have selected Sir Robert. He was rich, decorous, laborious, and had devoted himself regularly to the task. There was no other such man. It was likely, at least to superficial observers, that his name would descend to posterity as the "Sir Robert" of a new time;—a time changed, indeed, from that of Walpole, but resembling it in its desire to be ruled

by a great administrator, skilful in all kinds of business transactions, yet associated with the aristocracy; by one unremarkable in his opinions, but remarkable in his powers. The fates, however, designed Peel for a very different destiny; and to a really close observer there were signs in his horoscope which should have clearly revealed it. Sir Robert's father and grandfather were two of the men who created Lancashire. No sooner did the requisite machinery issue from the brain of the inventor, than its capabilities were seized on by strong, ready, bold men of business, who erected it, used it, devised a factory system, combined a factory population—created, in a word, that black industrial region, of whose augmenting wealth and horrid labour tales are daily borne to the genial and lazy south. Of course, it cannot be said that mill-makers invented the middle classes. The history of England perhaps shows, that it has not for centuries been without an unusual number of persons with comfortable and moderate means. But though this class has ever been found among us, and has ever been more active than in any other similar country, yet to a great extent it was scattered, headless, motionless. Small rural out-of-the-way towns, country factories few and far between, concealed and divided this great and mixed mass of petty means and steady intelligence. The huge heaps of manufacturing wealth were not to be concealed. They at once placed on a level with the highest in the land—in matters of expenditure, and in those countless social relations which depend upon expenditure—men sprung from the body of the people, unmistakably speaking its language, inevitably thinking its thoughts. It is true that the first manufacturers were not democratic. Sir Robert Peel, the statesman's father—a type of the class—was a firm, honest, domineering Conservative; but, however on such topics they may so think, however on other topics they may try to catch the language of the class to which they rise, the grain of the middle class will surely show itself in those who have risen from the middle class. If Mr. Cobden were to go over to the enemy, if he were to offer to serve Lord Derby *vice*

Disraeli disconcerted, it would not be possible for him to speak as the hereditary landowner speaks. It is not that the hereditary landowner knows more;—indeed, either in book-learning or in matters of observation, in acquaintance with what has been, or is going to be, or what now is, the owners of rent are not superior to the receivers of profits; yet their dialect is different—the one speaks the language of years of toil, and the other of years of indolence. A harsh laboriousness characterises the one, a pleasant geniality the other. The habit of industry is ingrained in those who have risen by it; it modifies every word and qualifies every notion. They are the *βάναυσοι* of work. Vainly, therefore, did the first manufacturers struggle to be Conservatives, to be baronets, to be peers. The titles they might obtain, their outward existence they might change, themselves in a manner they might alter; but a surer force was dragging them and those who resembled them into another region, filling them with other thoughts, making them express what people of the middle classes had always obscurely felt, pushing forward this new industrial order by the side, or even in front, of the old aristocratic order. The new class have not, indeed, shown themselves republican. They have not especially cared to influence the machinery of government. Their peculiarity has been, that they wish to see the government administered according to the notions familiar to them in their business life. They have no belief in mystery or magic; probably they have never appreciated the political influence of the imagination; they wish to see plain sense applied to the most prominent part of practical life. In his later career, the second Sir Robert Peel was the statesman who most completely and thoroughly expressed the sentiments of this new dynasty;—instead of being the nominee of a nobility, he became the representative of a transacting and trading multitude.

Both of these two classes were, however, equally possessed by the vice or tendency we commented on at the outset. They each of them desired to see the government carried on exactly according to their own views. The idea

on which seems to rest our only chance of again seeing great statesmen, of placing deep deferential trust in those who have given real proofs of comprehensive sagacity, had scarcely dawned on either. The average man had, so to say, varied; he was no longer of the one order, but of an inferior; but he was not at all less exacting or tyrannical. Perhaps he was even more so; for the indolent gentleman is less absolute and domineering than the active man of business. However that may be, it was the fate of Sir Robert Peel, in the two phases of his career, to take a leading share in carrying out the views, in administering the creed, first of one and then of the other.

Perhaps in our habitual estimate of Peel we hardly enough bear this in mind. We remember him as the guiding chief of the most intelligent Conservative government that this country has ever seen. We remember the great legislative acts which we owe to his trained capacity, every detail of which bears the impress of his practised hand; we know that his name is pronounced with applause in the great marts of trade and seats of industry; that even yet it is muttered with reproach in the obscure abodes of squires and rectors. We forget that his name was once the power of the Protestant interest, the shibboleth by which squires and rectors distinguished those whom they loved from those whom they hated; we forget that he defended the Manchester Massacre, the Six Acts, the Imposition of Tests, the rule of Orangemen. We remember Peel as the proper head of a moderate, intelligent, half-commercial community; we forget that he once was the chosen representative of a gentry untrained to great affairs, absorbed in a great war, only just recovering from the horror of a great revolution.

In truth, the character of Sir Robert Peel happily fitted him both to be the chosen head of a popular community, imperiously bent on its own ideas, and to be the head of that community in shifting and changing times. Sir Robert was at Harrow with Lord Byron, who has left the characteristic reminiscence: "I was always in scrapes, Peel never". And opposed as they were in their fortunes as boys and men, they were at least equally contrasted in the habit and kind of

action of their minds. Lord Byron's mind gained everything it was to gain by one intense, striking effort. By a blow of the imagination he elicited a single bright spark of light on every subject; and that was all. And this he never lost. The intensity of the thinking seemed to burn it on the memory, there to remain alone. But he made no second effort; he gained no more. He always avowed his incapability of continuous application: he could not, he said, learn the grammar of any language. In later life he showed considerable talent for action; but those who had to act with him observed that, versatile as were his talents, and mutable as his convictions had always seemed to be, in reality he was the most stubborn of men. He heard what you had to say; assented to all you had to say; and the next morning returned to his original opinion. No amount of ordinary argumentative resistance was so hopeless as that facile acquiescence and instantaneous recurrence. The truth was, that he was—and some others are similarly constituted—unable to retain anything which he did not at any rate *seem* to gain by the unaided single rush of his own mind. The ideas of such minds are often not new, very often they are hardly in the strictest sense original; they really were very much suggested from without, and preserved in some obscure corner of memory, out of the way and unknown; but it remains their characteristic, that they seem to the mind of the thinker to be born from its own depths, to be the product of its latent forces. There is a kind of eruption of ideas from a subter-conscious world. The whole mental action is volcanic; the lava flood glows in *Childe Harold;* all the thoughts are intense, flung forth vivid. The day after the eruption the mind is calm; it seems as if it could not again do the like; the product only remains, distinct, peculiar, indestructible. The mind of Peel was the exact opposite of this. His opinions far more resembled the daily accumulating insensible deposits of a rich alluvial soil. The great stream of time flows on with all things on its surface; and slowly, grain by grain, a mould of wise experience is unconsciously left on the still, extended intellect. You scarcely think of such a mind

as acting; it seems always acted upon. There is no trace of gushing, overpowering, spontaneous impulse; everything seems acquired. The thoughts are calm. In Lord Byron, the very style—dashing, free, incisive—shows the bold impulse from which it came. The stealthy accumulating words of Peel seem like the quiet leavings of an outward tendency, which brought these, but might as well have brought others. There is no peculiar stamp either in the ideas. They might have been any one's ideas. They belong to the general diffused stock of observations which are to be found in the civilised world. They are not native to the particular mind, nor "to the manner born". Like a science, they are credible or incredible by all men equally. This *secondary* order, as we may call it, of intellect, is evidently most useful to a statesman of the constitutional class, such as we have described him. He insensibly and inevitably takes in and imbibes, by means of it, the ideas of those around him. If he were left in a vacuum, he would have no ideas. The primary class of mind that strikes out its own belief would here be utterly at fault. It would want something which other men had; it would discover something which other men would not understand. Sir Robert Peel was a statesman for forty years; under our constitution, Lord Byron, eminent as was his insight into men, and remarkable as was his power, at least for short periods, of dealing with them, would not have been a statesman for forty days.

It is very likely that many people may not think Sir Robert Peel's mind so interesting as Lord Byron's. They may prefer the self-originating intellect, which invents and retains its own ideas, to the calm receptive intellect which acquires its belief from without. The answer lies in what has been said—a constitutional statesman must sympathise in the ideas of the many. As the many change, it will be his good fortune if he can contrive to change with them. It is to be remembered that statesmen do not live under hermetical seals. Like other men, they are influenced by the opinions of other men. How potent is this influence, those best know who have tried to hold ideas different from the ideas of those around.

In another point of view also Sir Robert Peel's character was exactly fitted to the position we have delineated. He was a great administrator. Civilisation requires this. In a simple age work may be difficult, but it is scarce. There are fewer people, and everybody wants fewer things. The mere tools of civilisation seem in some sort to augment work. In early times, when a despot wishes to govern a distant province, he sends down a satrap on a grand horse, with other people on little horses; and very little is heard of the satrap again unless he send back some of the little people to tell what he has been doing. No great labour of superintendence is possible. Common rumour and casual complaints are the sources of intelligence. If it seems certain that the province is in a bad state, satrap No. 1 is recalled, and satrap No. 2 is sent out in his stead. In civilised countries the whole thing is different. You erect a *bureau* in the province you want to govern; you make it write letters and copy letters; it sends home eight reports per diem to the head *bureau* in St. Petersburg. Nobody does a sum in the province without somebody doing the same sum in the capital, to "check him," and see that he does it correctly. The consequence of this is, to throw on the heads of departments an amount of reading and labour which can only be accomplished by the greatest natural aptitude, the most efficient training, the most firm and regular industry. Under a free government it is by no means better, perhaps in some respects it is worse. It is true that many questions which, under the French despotism, are referred to Paris, are settled in England on the very spot where they are to be done, without reference to London at all. But as a set-off, a constitutional administrator has to be always consulting others, finding out what this man or that man chooses to think; learning which form of error is believed by Lord B., which by Lord C.; adding up the errors of the alphabet, and seeing what portion of what he thinks he ought to do, they will all of them together allow him to do. Likewise, though the personal freedom and individual discretion which free governments allow to their subjects seem at first likely to diminish the work which those governments have to do, it may be doubted whether it

does so really and in the end. Individual discretion strikes out so many more pursuits, and some supervision must be maintained over each of those pursuits. No despotic government would consider the police force of London enough to keep down, watch, and superintend such a population; but then no despotic government would have such a city as London to keep down. The freedom of growth allows the possibility of growth; and though liberal governments take so much less in proportion upon them, yet the scale of operations is so much enlarged by the continual exercise of civil liberty, that the real work is ultimately perhaps as immense. While a despotic government is regulating ten per cent. of ten men's actions, a free government has to regulate one per cent. of a hundred men's actions. The difficulty, too, increases. Anybody can understand a rough despotic community;—a small buying class of nobles, a small selling class of traders, a large producing class of serfs, are much the same in all quarters of the globe; but a free, intellectual community is a complicated network of ramified relations, interlacing and passing hither and thither, old and new—some of fine city weaving, others of gross agricultural construction. You are never sure what effect any force or any change may produce on a framework so exquisite and so involved. Govern it as you may, it will be a work of great difficulty, labour, and responsibility; and no man who is thus occupied ought ever to go to bed without reflecting that from the difficulty of his employment he may, probably enough, have that day done more evil than good. What view Sir Robert Peel took of these duties he has himself informed us.

"Take the case of the Prime Minister. You must presume that he reads every important despatch from every foreign court. He cannot consult with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and exercise the influence which he ought to have with respect to the conduct of foreign affairs, unless he be master of everything of real importance passing in that department. It is the same with respect to other departments; India for instance: How can the Prime Minister be able to judge of the course of policy with regard to India,

unless he be cognisant of all the current important correspondence? In the case of Ireland and the Home Department it is the same. Then the Prime Minister has the patronage of the Crown to exercise, which you say, and justly say, is of so much importance and of so much value; he has to make inquiries into the qualifications of the persons who are candidates; he has to conduct the whole of the communications with the Sovereign, he has to write, probably with his own hand, the letters in reply to all persons of station who address themselves to him; he has to receive deputations on public business; during the sitting of parliament he is expected to attend six or seven hours a day, and for four or five days in the week; at least, he is blamed if he is absent."

The necessary effect of all this labour is, that those subject to it have no opinions. It requires a great deal of time to have opinions. Belief is a slow process. That leisure which the poets say is necessary to be good, or to be wise, is needful for the humbler task of allowing respectable maxims to take root respectably. The "wise passiveness" of Mr. Wordsworth is necessary in very ordinary matters. If you chain a man's head to a ledger, and keep him constantly adding up, and take a pound off his salary whenever he stops, you can't expect him to have a sound conviction on Catholic emancipation or tithes, and original ideas on the Transcaucasian provinces. Our system, indeed, seems expressly provided to make it unlikely. The most benumbing thing to the intellect is routine; the most bewildering is distraction: our system is a distracting routine. You see this in the description just given, which is not exhaustive. Sir Robert Peel once requested to have a number of questions carefully written down which they asked him one day in succession in the House of Commons. They seemed a list of everything that could occur in the British Empire, or to the brain of a member of Parliament. A Premier's whole life is a series of such transitions. It is wonderful that our public men have any minds left, rather than that a certain unfixity of opinion seems growing upon them.

We may go further on this subject. A great administrator is not a man likely to desire to have fixed opinions. His natural bent and tendency is to immediate action. The existing and pressing circumstances of the case fill up his mind. The letters to be answered, the documents to be filed, the memoranda to be made, engross his attention. He is angry if you distract him. A bold person who suggests a matter of principle, or a difficulty of thought, or an abstract result that seems improbable in the case "before the board," will be set down as a speculator, a theorist, a troubler of practical life. To expect to hear from such men profound views of future policy, digested plans of distant action, is to mistake their genius entirely. It is like asking the broker of the Stock Exchange what will be the price of the funds this day six months! His whole soul is absorbed in thinking what that price will be in ten minutes. A momentary change of an eighth is more important to him than a distant change of a hundred eighths. So the brain of a great administrator is naturally occupied with the details of the day, the passing dust, the granules of that day's life; and his unforeseeing temperament turns away uninterested from reaching speculations, from vague thought, and from extensive and far-off plans. Of course, it is not meant that a great administrator has absolutely no general views; some indeed he must have. A man cannot conduct the detail of affairs without having some plan which regulates that detail. He cannot help having some idea, vague or accurate, indistinct or distinct, of the direction in which he is going, and the purpose for which he is travelling. But the difference is, that this plan is seldom his own, the offspring of his own brain, the result of his own mental contention; it is the plan of some one else. Providence generally bestows on the working adaptive man a quiet adoptive nature. He receives insensibly the suggestions of others; he hears them with willing ears; he accepts them with placid belief. An acquiescent credulity is a quality of such men's nature; they cannot help being sure that what every one says must be true; the *vox populi* is a part of their natural religion. It has been made a matter of wonder that Peel should have belonged

to the creed of Mr. Perceval and Lord Sidmouth. Perhaps, indeed, our existing psychology will hardly explain the process by which a decorous young man acquires the creed of his era. He assumes its belief as he assumes its costume. He imitates the respectable classes. He avoids an original opinion, like an *outré* coat; a new idea, like an unknown tie. Especially he does so on matters of real concern to him, on those on which he knows he must act. He acquiesces in the creed of the orthodox agents. He scarcely considers for himself; he acknowledges the apparent authority of dignified experience. He is, he remembers, but the junior partner in the firm; it does not occur to him to doubt that those were right who were occupied in its management years before him. In this way he acquires an experience which more independent and original minds are apt to want. There was a great cry when the Whigs came into office, at the time of the Reform Bill, that they were not men of business. Of course, after a very long absence from office, they could not possess a technical acquaintance with official forms, a trained facility in official action. This Sir Robert Peel acquired from his apprenticeship to Mr. Perceval. His early connection with the narrow Conservative party has been considered a disadvantage to him; but it may well be doubted whether his peculiar mind was not more improved by the administrative training than impaired by the contact with prejudiced thoughts. He never could have been a great thinker; he became what nature designed, a great agent.

In a third respect also Sir Robert Peel conformed to the type of a constitutional statesman; and that third respect also seems naturally to lead to a want of defined principle, and to apparent fluctuation of opinion. He was a great debater; and of all pursuits ever invented by man for separating the faculty of argument from the capacity of belief, the art of debating is probably the most effectual. Macaulay tells us that, in his opinion, this is "the most serious of the evils which are to be set off against the many blessings of popular government. The keenest and most vigorous minds of every generation, minds often admirably fitted for the investigation of truth, are habit-

ually employed in producing arguments such as no man of sense would ever put into a treatise intended for publication—arguments which are just good enough to be used once, when aided by fluent delivery and pointed language. The habit of discussing questions in this way necessarily reacts on the intellects of our ablest men, particularly of those who are introduced into Parliament at a very early age, before their minds have expanded to full maturity. The talent for debate is developed in such men to a degree which, to the multitude, seems as marvellous as the performances of an Italian *improvisatore*. But they are fortunate indeed if they retain unimpaired the faculties which are required for close reasoning, or for enlarged speculation. Indeed, we should sooner expect a great original work on political science—such a work, for example, as *The Wealth of Nations*—from an apothecary in a country town, or from a minister in the Hebrides, than from a statesman who, ever since he was one and twenty, had been a distinguished debater in the House of Commons." But it may well be doubted whether there is not in the same pursuit a deeper evil, hard to eradicate, and tending to corrupt and destroy the minds of those who are beneath its influence. Constitutional statesmen are obliged, not only to employ arguments which they do not think conclusive, but likewise to defend opinions which they do not believe to be true. Whether we approve it or lament it, there is no question that our existing political life is deeply marked by the habit of advocacy. Perhaps fifteen measures may annually, on an average, be brought in by a cabinet government of fifteen persons. It is impossible to believe that all members of that cabinet agree in all those measures. No two people agree in fifteen things; fifteen clever men never yet agreed in anything; yet they all defend them, argue for them, are responsible for them. It is always quite possible that the minister who is strenuously defending a bill in the House of Commons may have used in the cabinet the very arguments which the Opposition are using in the House; he may have been overruled without being convinced; he may still think the conclusions he opposes better than those which he inculcates. It is idle to say that he ought to go out; at

least, it amounts to saying that government by means of a cabinet is impossible. The object of a committee of that kind is to agree on certain conclusions; if every member after the meeting were to start off according to the individual bent and bias of his mind, according to his own individual discretion or indiscretion, the previous concurrence would have become childish. Of course, the actual measure proposed by the collective voice of several persons is very different from what any one of these persons would of himself wish; it is the result of a compromise between them. Each, perhaps, has obtained some concession; each has given up something. Every one sees in the actual proposal something of which he strongly disapproves; every one regrets the absence of something which he much desires. Yet, on the whole, perhaps, he thinks the measure better than no measure; or at least he thinks that if he went out, it would break up the government; and imagines it to be of more consequence that the government should be maintained than that the particular measure should be rejected. He concedes his individual judgment. No one has laid this down with more distinctness than Sir Robert Peel. "Supposing a person at a dinner-table to express his private opinion of a measure originating with a party with whom he is united in public life, is he, in the event of giving up that private opinion out of deference to his party, to be exposed to a charge almost amounting to dishonesty? The idea is absurd.—What is the every-day conduct of government itself? Is there any one in this House so ignorant as to suppose that on all questions cabinet ministers, who yield to the decision of their colleagues, speak and act in parliament in strict conformity with the opinions they have expressed in the cabinet? If ministers are to be taunted on every occasion that they hold opinions in the cabinet different from what they do in this House, and if parliament is to be made the scene of these taunts, I believe I should not be going too far in saying the House would have time for little else. It is the uniform practice with all governments, and I should be sorry to think the practice carries any stain with it, for a member of the administration who chances to entertain opinions differing from those of the majority of his

colleagues, rather than separate himself from them, to submit to be overruled, and even though he do not fully concur in their policy, to give his support to the measures which, as an administration, they promulgate. I will give the House an instance of this fact. It was very generally reported on a late occasion, that upon the question of sending troops to Portugal a strong difference of opinion took place in the cabinet. Now would it, I ask, be either just or fair to call on those who, in the discussion of the cabinet, had spoken in favour of sending out troops to aid the cause of Donna Maria, to come down, and in parliament advocate that measure in opposition to the decision of their colleagues? No one would think of doing so." It may not carry a stain; but it is a painful idea.

It is evident, too, that this necessarily leads to great apparent changes of opinion—to the professed belief of a statesman at one moment being utterly different from what it seems to be at another moment. When a government is founded, questions A, B, C, D, E, F, are the great questions of the day —the matters which are obvious, pressing—which the public mind comprehends. X, Y, Z, are in the background, little thought of, obscure. According to the received morality, no statesman would hesitate to sacrifice the last to the first. He might have a very strong personal opinion on X, but he would surrender it to a colleague as the price of his co-operation on A or B. A few years afterwards times change. Question A is carried, B settles itself, E and F are forgotten, X becomes the most important topic of the day. The statesman who conceded X before, now feels that he no longer can concede it; there is no equivalent. He has never in reality changed his opinion, yet he has to argue in favour of the very measures which he endeavoured before to argue against. Everybody thinks he has changed, and without going into details, the secrecy of which is esteemed essential to confidential co-operation, it is impossible that he can evince his consistency. It is impossible to doubt that this is a very serious evil, and it is plainly one consequent on, or much exaggerated by, a popular and argumentative government. It is very possible for a con-

scientious man, under a bureaucratic government, to co-operate with the rest of a council in the elaboration and execution of measures, many of which he thinks inexpedient. Nobody asks him his opinion; he has not to argue, or defend, or persuade. But a free government boasts that it is carried on in the face of day. Its principle is discussion; its habit is debate. The consequence is, that those who conduct it have to defend measures they disapprove, to object to measures they approve, to appear to have an accurate opinion on points on which they really have no opinion. The calling of a constitutional statesman is very much that of a political advocate; he receives a new brief with the changing circumstances of each successive day. It is easy to conceive a cold sardonic intellect, moved with contempt at such a life, casting aside the half-and-half pretences with which others partly deceive themselves, stating anything, preserving an intellectual preference for truth, but regarding any effort at its special advocacy as the weak aim of foolish men, striving for what they cannot attain. Lord Lyndhurst has shown us that it is possible to lead the life of Lord Lyndhurst. One can conceive, too, a cold and somewhat narrow intellect, capable of forming, in any untroubled scene, an accurate plain conviction, but without much power of entering into the varying views of others; little skilled in diversified argument; understanding its own opinion, and not understanding the opinions of others;—one can imagine such a mind pained, and cracked, and shattered, by endeavouring to lead a life of ostentatious argument in favour of others' opinions, of half-concealment of its chill, unaltering essence. It will be for posterity to make due allowance for the variance between the character and the position of Lord John Russell.

Sir Robert Peel was exactly fit for this life. The word which exactly fits his oratory is—specious. He hardly ever said anything which struck you in a moment to be true; he never uttered a sentence which for a moment anybody could deny to be plausible. Once, when they were opposed on a railway bill, the keen irascibility of Lord Derby stimulated him to observe "that *no one* knew like the right honourable baronet

how to *dress up* a case for that House". The art of statement, the power of detail, the watching for the weak points of an opponent, an average style adapting itself equally to what the speaker believed and what he disbelieved, a business air, a didactic precision for what it was convenient to make clear, an unctuous disguise of flowing periods, and "a deep sense of responsibility" for what it was convenient to conceal, an enormous facility, made Sir Robert Peel a nearly unequalled master of the art of political advocacy. For his times he was perhaps quite unequalled. He might have failed in times of deep, outpouring patriotic excitement; he had not nature enough to express it. He might have failed in an age when there was nothing to do, and when elegant personality and the *finesse* of artistic expression were of all things most required. But for an age of important business, when there was an unusual number of great topics to be discussed, but none great enough to hurry men away from their business habits, or awaken the most ardent passion or the highest imagination, there is nothing like the oratory of Peel—able but not aspiring, firm but not exalted, never great but ever adequate to great affairs. It is curious to know that he was trained to the trade.

"Soon after Peel was born, his father, the first baronet, finding himself rising daily in wealth and consequence, and believing that money in those peculiar days could always command a seat in Parliament, determined to bring up his son expressly for the House of Commons. When that son was quite a child, Sir Robert would frequently set him on the table and say, 'Now, Robin, make a speech, and I will give you this cherry'. What few words the little fellow produced were applauded; and applause stimulating exertion produced such effects that, before Robin was ten years old, he could really address the company with some degree of eloquence. As he grew up, his father constantly took him every Sunday into his private room and made him repeat, as well as he could, the sermon which had been preached. Little progress in effecting this was made, and little was expected *at first*, but by steady perseverance the habit of attention grew powerful, and the sermon was repeated almost *verbatim*. When at

a very distant day the senator, remembering accurately the speech of an opponent, answered his arguments in correct succession, it was little known that the power of so doing was originally acquired in Drayton Church."

A mischievous observer might say, that something else had remained to Sir Robert Peel from these sermons. His tone is a trifle sermonic. He failed where perhaps alone Lord John Russell has succeeded—in the oratory of conviction.

If we bear in mind the whole of these circumstances; if we picture in our minds a nature at once active and facile, easily acquiring its opinions from without, not easily devising them from within, a large placid adaptive intellect, devoid of irritable intense originality, prone to forget the ideas of yesterday, inclined to accept the ideas of to-day—if we imagine a man so formed cast early into absorbing, exhausting industry of detail, with work enough to fill up a life, with action of itself enough to render speculation almost impossible—placed too in a position unsuited to abstract thought, of which the conventions and rules require that a man should feign other men's thoughts, should impugn his own opinions—we shall begin to imagine a conscientious man destitute of convictions on the occupations of his life—to comprehend the character of Sir Robert Peel.

That Sir Robert was a very conscientious man is quite certain. It is even probable that he had a morbid sense of administrative responsibility. We do not say that he was so weighed down as Lord Liverpool, who is alleged never to have opened his letters without a pang of foreboding that something had miscarried somewhere; but every testimony agrees that Sir Robert had an anxious sense of duty in detail. Lord Wellesley, somewhere in this volume,[1] on an occasion when it would have been at least equally natural to speak of administrative capacity and efficient co-operation, mentions only "the real impressions which your kindness and high character have fixed in my mind". The circumstances of his end naturally produced a crowd of tributes to his memory, and hardly any of them omit his deep sense of the obligations of

[1] *National Review*, July, 1856.

action. The characteristic, too, is written conspicuously on every line of these memoirs. Disappointing and external as in some respects they seem, they all the more evidently bear witness to this trait. They read like the conscientious letters of an ordinary practical man; the great statesman has little other notion than that it is his duty to transact his business well. As a conspicuous merit, the Duke of Wellington, oddly enough according to some people's notions at the time, selected Peel's veracity. "In the whole course of my communication with him I have never known an instance in which he did not show the strictest preference for truth. I never had, in the whole course of my life, the slightest reason for suspecting that he stated anything which he did not firmly believe to be the fact. I could not sit down without stating what I believe, after a long acquaintance, to have been his most striking characteristic." Simple people in the country were a little astonished to hear so strong a eulogy on a man for not telling lies. They were under the impression that people in general did not. But those who have considered the tempting nature of a statesman's pursuits, the secrets of office, the inevitable complication of his personal relations, will not be surprised that many statesmen should be without veracity, or that one should be eulogised for possessing it. It is to be remarked, however, in mitigation of so awful an excellence, that Sir Robert was seldom in "scrapes," and that it is on those occasions that the virtue of veracity is apt to be most severely tested. The same remark is applicable to the well-praised truthfulness of the duke himself.

In conjunction with the great soldier, Sir Robert Peel is entitled to the fame of a great act of administrative conscience. He purified the Tory party. There is little doubt that, during the long and secure reign which the Tories enjoyed about the beginning of the century, there was much of the corruption naturally incident to a strong party with many adherents to provide for, uncontrolled by an effective Opposition, unwatched by a great nation. Of course, too, any government remaining over from the last century would inevitably have adhering to it various *remanet* corruptions of

that curious epoch. There flourished those mighty sinecures and reversions, a few of which still remain to be the wonder and envy of an unenjoying generation. The House of Commons was not difficult then to manage. There is a legend that a distinguished Treasury official of the last century,[1] a very capable man, used to say of any case which was hopelessly and inevitably bad: "Ah, we must apply our majority to this question"; and no argument is so effectual as the mechanical, calculable suffrage of a strong, unreasoning party. There were doubtless many excellent men in the Tory party, even in its least excellent days; but the two men to whom the party, as such, owes most of purification were the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel. From the time when they became responsible for the management of a Conservative government, there was no doubt, in office or in the nation, that the public money and patronage were administered by men whom no consideration would induce to use either for their personal benefit; and who would, as far as their whole power lay, discourage and prevent the corrupt use of either by others. The process by which they succeeded in conveying this impression is illustrated by a chapter in the Dean of York's *Memoir of Peel*, in which that well-known dignitary recounts the temptations which he applied to the political purity of his relative.

"While Peel was Secretary for Ireland, I asked him to give a very trifling situation, nominally in his gift, to a worthy person for whom I felt an interest. He wrote me word that he was really anxious to oblige me in this matter, but that a nobleman of much parliamentary interest, who supported the government, insisted upon his right to dispose of all patronage in his own neighbourhood. So anxious was Peel to show his good will towards me, that he prevailed upon the Lord-Lieutenant to ask as a favour from the aforesaid nobleman that the situation might be given to my nominee: but the marquis replied that the situation was of no value, yet, to prevent a dangerous precedent, he must refuse the application.

"In times long after, when Sir Robert Peel became prime minister, I asked him often in the course of many years for situations for my sons, which situations were vacant and in his immediate gift. I subjoin three letters which I received from him on these subjects; they were written

[1] George Rose.

after long intervals and at different periods, but they all speak the same language :—

" Whitehall, December 20 (no date of year).

" MY DEAR DEAN OF YORK,—I thank you for your consideration of what you deem the unrequited sacrifice which I make in the public service. But I beg to say that my chief consolation and reward is the *consciousness* that my exertions are disinterested—that I have considered official patronage as a public trust, to be applied to the reward and encouragement of public service, or to the less praiseworthy, but still necessary, purpose of promoting the general interests of the government. That patronage is so wholly inadequate to meet the fair claims of a public nature, that are daily presented for my consideration, and that constitute the chief torment of office, that I can only overcome the difficulties connected with the distribution by the utmost forbearance as to deriving any personal advantage from it. If I had absolute control over the appointment to which you refer, I should apply it to the satisfaction of one or other of the engagements into which I entered when I formed the government, and which (from the absolute want of means) remain unfulfilled. But I have informed the numerous parties who have applied to me on the subject of that appointment, that I feel it to be my duty, on account of the present condition of the board and the functions they have to perform, to select for it some experienced man of business connected with the naval profession, or some man distinguished in that profession.

" Believe me, my dear Dean, affectionately yours,

" ROBERT PEEL.

" I applied again for another place of less importance : the answer was much the same as before :—

" Whitehall, April 5, 1843.

" MY DEAR DEAN OF YORK,—I must dispose of the appointment to which you refer upon the same principle on which I have uniformly disposed of every appointment of a similar nature.

" I do not consider patronage of this kind (and, indeed, I may truly say it of all patronage) as the means of gratifying private wishes of any one. Those who have made locally great sacrifices and great exertions for the maintenance of the political cause which they espouse, have always been considered fairly entitled to be consulted in respect to the disposal of local patronage, and would justly complain if, in order to promote the interests of a relative of my own, I were to disregard their recommendations. It would subject me to great personal embarrassment, and be a complete departure from the rule to which I have always adhered.

"All patronage of all descriptions, so far from being of the least advantage personally to a minister, involves him in nothing but embarrassment. Ever affectionately yours,

"ROBERT PEEL.

"I publish one more letter of the same kind, because all these letters exhibit the character of the writer, and contain matters of some public interest. The distributor of stamps died in the very place where my son was resident, and where he and I had exerted considerable interest in assisting the government members. I thought that now, perhaps, an exception might be made to the general rule, and I confidently recommended my eldest son for the vacancy. The following was the answer:—

"Whitehall, May 1.

"MY DEAR DEAN,—Whatever arrangements may be made with respect to the office of distributor of stamps, lately held by Mr. ——, I do not feel myself justified in appropriating to myself any share of the local patronage of a county with which I have not the remotest connection by property, or any other local tie.

"There are three members for the county of —— who support the Government; and, in addition to the applications which I shall no doubt have from them, I have already received recommendations from the Duke of —— and Earl ——, each having certainly better claims than I have personally for local appointments in the county of ——.

"I feel it quite impossible to make so complete a departure from the principles on which I have invariably acted, and which I feel to be nothing more than consistent with common justice, as to take ——shire offices for my own private purposes.

"Very faithfully yours,

"ROBERT PEEL.

"These letters show the noble principle on which Sir Robert's public life was founded. I am quite sure that he had a great regard for my sons. He invited them to his shooting quarters, was pleased to find them amusement, and made them many handsome presents; but he steadily refused to enrich them out of the public purse merely because they were his nephews. Many prime ministers have not been so scrupulous."

And clearly *one* divine wishes Sir Robert Peel had not been so.

The changes of opinion which Sir Robert Peel underwent are often cited as indications of a want of conscientiousness. They really are, subject, of course, to the preceding remarks, proofs of his conscientiousness. We do not mean in the obvious sense of their being opposed to his visible interest, and

having on two great occasions destroyed the most serviceable party organisation ever ruled by a statesman in a political age; but in a more refined sense, the timeliness of his transitions may, without overstraining, be thought a mark of their *bonâ fides*. He could not have changed with such felicitous exactness, if he had been guided by selfish calculation. The problems were too great and too wide. There have, of course, been a few men—Talleyrand and Theramenes are instances—who have seemed to hit, as if by a political sense, the fitting moment to leave the side which was about to fall, and to join the side which was about to rise. But these will commonly be found to be men of a very different character from that of Peel. Minds are divided into open and close. Some men are so sensitive to extrinsic impressions, pass so easily from one man to another, catch so well the tone of each man's thought, use so well the opportunities of society for the purposes of affairs, that they are, as it were, by habit and practice, metrical instruments of public opinion. Sir Robert was by character, both natural and acquired, the very reverse. He was a reserved, occupied man of business. In the arts of society, in the easy transition from person to person, from tone to tone, he was but little skilled. If he had been left to pick up his rules of conduct by mere social perception and observation, his life would have been a life of miscalculations; instead of admiring the timeliness of his conversions, we should wonder at the perversity of his transitions. The case is not new. In ancient times, at a remarkable moment, in the persons of two selfish men of genius, the open mind was contrasted with the close. By a marvellous combination of successive manœuvres, Julius Cæsar rose from ruin to empire; the spoiled child of society—sensitive to each breath of opinion—ever living at least among the externals of enjoyment—always retaining, by a genial kindliness of manner, friends from each of the classes which he variously used. By what the vulgar might be pardoned for thinking a divine infatuation, Pompeius lost the best of political positions, threw away every recurring chance, and died a wandering exile. As a reserved, ungenial man, he never was able to estimate the feeling of the time.

"I have only to stamp with my foot when the occasion requires, to raise legions from the soil of Italy!" were the words of one who could not in his utmost need raise a force to strike one blow for Italy itself. The fate of Pompeius would have been that of Peel, if he too had played the game of selfish calculation. His changes, as it has been explained, are to be otherwise accounted for. He was always anxious to do right. An occupied man of business, he was converted when other men of business in the nation were converted.

It is not, however, to be denied that a calm and bland nature like that of Peel is peculiarly prone to self-illusion. Many fancy that it is passionate, imaginative men who most deceive themselves; and of course they are more tempted—a more vivid fancy and a more powerful impulse hurry them away. But they know their own weakness. "Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Coleridge?" asked some lady. "No, ma'am, I have seen too many," was the answer. A quiet, calm nature, when it is tempted by its own wishes, is hardly conscious that it is tempted. These wishes are so gentle, quiet, as it would say, so "reasonable," that it does not conceive it possible to be hurried away into error by them. Nor *is* there any hurry. They operate quietly, gently, and constantly. Such a man will very much believe what he wishes. Many an imaginative outcast, whom no man would trust with sixpence, really forms his opinions on points which interest him by a much more intellectual process—at least, has more purely intellectual opinions beaten and tortured into him—than the eminent and respected man of business, in whom every one confides, who is considered a model of dry judgment, of clear and passionless equanimity. Doubtless Sir Robert Peel went on believing in the corn laws, when no one in the distrusted classes even fancied that they were credible.

It has been bitterly observed of Sir Robert Peel, that he was "a Radical at heart"; and, perhaps, with a similar thought in his mind, Mr. Cobden said once, at a League meeting, "I do not altogether like to give up Peel. You see he is a Lancashire man." And it cannot be questioned that, strongly opposed as Sir Robert Peel was to the Reform Bill,

he was really much more suited to the reformed than to the unreformed House of Commons. The style of debating in the latter was described by one who had much opportunity for observation, Sir James Mackintosh, as "continuous, animated, after-dinner discussion". The House was composed mainly of men trained in two great schools, on a peculiar mode of education, with no great real knowledge of the classics, but with many lines of Virgil and Horace lingering in fading memories, contrasting oddly with the sums and business with which they were necessarily brought side by side. These gentlemen wanted not to be instructed, but to be amused; and hence arose what, from the circumstance of their calling, may be called the class of conversationalist statesmen. Mr. Canning was the type of these. He was a man of elegant gifts, of easy fluency, capable of embellishing anything, with a nice wit, gliding swiftly over the most delicate topics; passing from topic to topic like the *raconteur* of the dinner-table, touching easily on them all, letting them all go as easily; confusing you as to whether he knows nothing or knows everything. The peculiar irritation which Mr. Canning excited through life was, at least in part, owing to the natural wrath with which you hear the changing talk of the practised talker running away about all the universe; never saying anything which indicates real knowledge, never saying anything which at the very moment can be shown to be a blunder; ever on the surface, and ever ingratiating itself with the superficial. When Mr. Canning was alive, sound men of all political persuasions—the Duke of Wellington, Lord Grey—ever disliked him. You may hear old Liberals to this day declaring he was the greatest charlatan who ever lived, angry to imagine that his very ghost exists; and when you read his speeches yourself, you are at once conscious of a certain dexterous insincerity which seems to lurk in the very felicities of expression, and to be made finer with the very refinements of the phraseology. Like the professional converser, he seems so apt at the *finesse* of expression, so prone to modulate his words, that you cannot imagine him putting his fine mind to tough thinking, really working, actually grappling with the

rough substance of a great subject. Of course, if this were the place for an estimate of Mr. Canning, there would be some limitation, and much excuse to be offered for all this. He was early thrown into what we may call an aristocratic debating society, accustomed to be charmed, delighting in classic gladiatorship. To expect a great speculator, or a principled statesman, from such a position, would be expecting German from a Parisian, or plainness from a diplomatist. He grew on the soil on which he had been cast; and it is hard, perhaps impossible, to separate the faults which are due to it and to him. He and it have both passed away. The old delicate parliament is gone, and the gladiatorship which it loved. The progress of things, and the Reform Bill which was the result of that progress, have taken, and are taking, the national representation away from the university classes, and conferring it on the practical classes. Exposition, arithmetic, detail, reforms—these are the staple of our modern eloquence. The old boroughs which introduced the young scholars are passed away; and even if the young scholars were in parliament, the subjects do not need the classic tact of expression. Very plain speaking suits the "passing tolls," "registration of joint-stock companies," finance, the Post-office. The petty regulation of the details of civilisation, which happily is the daily task of our Government, does not need, does not suit, a *recherché* taste or an ornate eloquence. As is the speech, so are the men. Sir Robert Peel was inferior to Canning in the old parliament; he would have been infinitely superior to him in the new. The aristocratic refinement, the nice embellishment, of the old time, were as alien to him as the detail and dryness of the new era were suitable. He was admirably fitted to be where the Reform Bill placed him. He was fitted to work and explain; he was not able to charm or to amuse.

In its exact form this kind of eloquence and statesmanship is peculiar to modern times, and even to this age. In ancient times the existence of slavery forbade the existence of a middle-class eloquence. The Cleon who possessed the tone and the confidence of the people in trade was a man vulgar,

coarse, speaking the sentiments of a class whose views were narrow and whose words were mean. So many occupations were confined to slaves, that there was scarcely an opening for the sensible, moderate, rational body whom we now see. It was, of course, always possible to express the sentiments and prejudices of people in trade. It is new to this era, it seems created for Sir Robert Peel to express those sentiments, in a style refined, but not too refined; which will not jar people of high cultivation, which will seem suitable to men of common cares and important transactions.

In another respect Sir Robert Peel was a fortunate man. The principal measures required in his age were "repeals". From changing circumstances, the old legislation would no longer suit a changed community; and there was a clamour, first for the repeal of one important Act, and then of another. This was suitable to the genius of Peel. He could hardly have created anything. His intellect, admirable in administrative routine, endlessly fertile in suggestions of detail, was not of the class which creates, or which readily even believes an absolutely new idea. As has been so often said, he typified the practical intelligence of his time. He was prone, as has been explained, to receive the daily deposits of insensibly-changing opinion; but he could bear nothing startling; nothing bold, original, single, is to be found in his acts or his words. Nothing could be so suitable to such a mind as a conviction that an existing law was wrong. The successive gradations of opinion pointed to a clear and absolute result. When it was a question, as in the case of the Reform Bill, not of simple abolition, but of extensive and difficult reconstruction, he "could not see his way". He could be convinced that the anti-Catholic laws were wrong, that the currency laws were wrong, that the commercial laws were wrong; especially he could be convinced that the *laissez-faire* system was right, and the real thing was to do nothing; but he was incapable of the larger and higher political construction. A more imaginative genius is necessary to deal with the consequences of new creations, and the structure of an unseen future.

This remark requires one limitation. A great deal of

what is called legislation is really administrative regulation. It does not settle what is to be done, but *how* it is to be done; it does not prescribe what our institutions shall be, but directs in what manner existing institutions shall work and operate. Of this portion of legislation Sir Robert Peel was an admirable master. Few men have fitted administrative regulations with so nice an adjustment to a prescribed end. The Currency Act of 1844 was an instance of this. If you consult the speeches by which that bill was introduced and explained to parliament, you certainly will not find any very rigid demonstrations of political economy, or dry compactness of abstract principle. Whether the abstract theory of the supporters of that Act be sound or unsound, no exposition of it ever came from the lips of Peel. He assumed the results of that theory; but no man saw more quickly the nature of the administrative machinery which was required. The separation of the departments of the Bank of England, the limitation of the country issues, though neither of them original ideas of Sir Robert's own mind, yet were not, like most of his other important political acts, forced on him from without. There was a general agreement among the received authorities in favour of a certain currency theory; the administrative statesman saw a good deal before other men what was the most judicious and effectual way of setting it at work and regulating its action.

We have only spoken of Sir Robert Peel as a public man; and if you wish to write what is characteristic about him, that is the way to do so. He was a man whom it requires an effort to think of as engaged in anything but political business. Disraeli tells us that some one said that Peel was never happy except in the House of Commons, or doing something which had some relation to something to be done there. In common life, we continually see men scarcely separable as it were from their pursuits; they are as good as others, but their visible nature seems almost all absorbed in a certain visible calling. When we speak of them we are led to speak of it, when we would speak of it we are led insensibly to speak of them. It is so with Sir Robert Peel. So long as constitutional statesmanship is what it is now, so long as its function consists in

recording the views of a confused nation, so long as success in it is confined to minds plastic, changeful, administrative—we must hope for no better man. You have excluded the profound thinker; you must be content with what you can obtain —the business gentleman.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.[1]

(1856.)

AFTER the long biography of Moore, it is half a comfort to think of a poet as to whom our information is but scanty. The few intimates of Shelley seem inclined to go to their graves without telling in accurate detail the curious circumstances of his life. We are left to be content with vain "prefaces" and the circumstantial details of a remarkable blunderer. We know something, however;—we know enough to check our inferences from his writings; in some moods it is pleasant not to have them disturbed by long volumes of memoirs and anecdotes.

One peculiarity of Shelley's writing makes it natural that at times we should not care to have, that at times we should wish for, a full biography. No writer has left so clear an image of himself in his writings; when we remember them as a whole, we seem to want no more. No writer, on the other hand, has left so many little allusions which we should be glad to have explained, which the patient patriarch would not perhaps have endured that any one should comprehend while he did not. The reason is, that Shelley has combined the use of the two great modes by which writers leave with their readers the image of themselves. There is the art of self-delineation. Some authors try in imagination to get outside themselves—to contemplate their character as a fact, and to describe it and the

[1] *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1853.

Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and Fragments. By Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1854.

The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Captain Thomas Medwin. 1847.

movement of their own actions as external forms and images. Scarcely any one has done this as often as Shelley. There is hardly one of his longer works which does not contain a finished picture of himself in some point or under some circumstances. Again, some writers, almost or quite unconsciously, by a special instinct of style, give an idea of themselves. This is not peculiar to literary men; it is quite as remarkable among men of action. There are people in the world who cannot write the commonest letter on the commonest affair of business without giving a just idea of themselves. The Duke of Wellington is an example which at once occurs of this. You may read a despatch of his about bullocks and horseshoe-nails, and yet you will feel an interest—a great interest, because somehow among the words seems to lurk the mind of a great general. Shelley has this peculiarity also. Every line of his has a personal impress, an unconscious inimitable manner. And the two modes in which he gives an idea of himself concur. In every delineation we see the same simple intense being. As mythology found a Naiad in the course of every limpid stream, so through each eager line our fancy sees the same panting image of sculptured purity.

Shelley is probably the most remarkable instance of the pure impulsive character,—to comprehend which requires a little detail. Some men are born under the law; their whole life is a continued struggle between the lower principles of their nature and the higher. These are what are called men of principle; each of their best actions is a distinct choice between conflicting motives. One propension would bear them here; another there; a third would hold them still: into the midst the living will goes forth in its power, and selects whichever it holds to be best. The habitual supremacy of conscience in such men gives them an idea that they only exert their will when they do right; when they do wrong they seem to "let their nature go"; they say that "they are hurried away": but, in fact, there is commonly an act of will in both cases;—only it is weaker when they act ill, because in passably good men, if the better principles are reasonably strong, they conquer; it is only when very faint that they are vanquished. Yet the

case is evidently not always so; sometimes the wrong principle is of itself and of set purpose definitively chosen: the better one is consciously put down. The very existence of divided natures is a conflict. This is no new description of human nature. For eighteen hundred years Christendom has been amazed at the description in St. Paul of the law of his members warring against the law of his mind. Expressions most unlike in language, but not dissimilar in meaning, are to be found in some of the most familiar passages of Aristotle.

In extreme contrast to this is the nature which has no struggle. It is possible to conceive a character in which but one impulse is ever felt—in which the whole being, as with a single breeze, is carried in a single direction. The only exercise of the will in such a being is in aiding and carrying out the dictates of the single propensity. And this is something. There are many of our powers and faculties only in a subordinate degree under the control of the emotions; the intellect itself in many moments requires to be bent to defined attention by compulsion of the will; no mere intensity of desire will thrust it on its tasks. But of what in most men is the characteristic action of the will—namely, self-control—such natures are hardly in want. An ultimate case could be imagined in which they would not need it at all. They have no lower desires to pull down, for they have no higher ones which come into collision with them; the very words "lower" and "higher," involving the contemporaneous action and collision of two impulses are inapplicable to them; there is no strife; all their souls impel them in a single line. This may be a quality of the highest character: indeed in the highest character it will certainly be found; no one will question that the whole nature of the holiest being tends to what is holy without let, struggle, or strife—it would be impiety to doubt it. Yet this same quality may certainly be found in a lower—a much lower—mind than the highest. A level may be of any elevation; the absence of intestine commotion may arise from a sluggish dulness to eager aspirations; the one impulse which is felt may be any impulse whatever. If the idea were completely exemplified, one would instinctively say, that a being with so

single a mind could hardly belong to human nature. Temptation is the mark of our life; we can hardly divest ourselves of the idea that it is indivisible from our character. As it was said of solitude, so it may be said of the sole dominion of a single impulse: "Whoso is devoted to it would seem to be either a beast or a god".[1]

Completely realised on earth this idea will never be; but approximations may be found, and one of the closest of those approximations is Shelley. We fancy his mind placed in the light of thought, with pure subtle fancies playing to and fro. On a sudden an impulse arises; it is alone, and has nothing to contend with; it cramps the intellect, pushes aside the fancies, constrains the nature; it bolts forward into action. Such a character is an extreme puzzle to external observers. From the occasionality of its impulses it will often seem silly; from their singularity, strange; from their intensity, fanatical. It is absurdest in the more trifling matters. There is a legend of Shelley, during an early visit to London, flying along the street, catching sight of a new microscope, buying it in a moment; pawning it the instant afterwards to relieve some one in the same street in distress. The trait may be exaggerated, but it is characteristic. It shows the sudden irruption of his impulses, their abrupt force and curious purity.

The predominant impulse in Shelley from a very early age was "a passion for reforming mankind". Francis Newman has told us in his *Letters from the East* how much he and his half-missionary associates were annoyed at being called "young people trying to convert the world". In a strange land, ignorant of the language, beside a recognised religion, in the midst of an immemorial society, the aim, though in a sense theirs, seemed ridiculous when ascribed to them. Shelley would not have felt this at all. No society, however organised, would have been too strong for him to attack. He would not have paused. The impulse was upon him. He would have been ready to preach that mankind were to be "free, equal, pure, and wise,"[2]—in favour of "justice, and truth, and

[1] Bacon: "Essay on Friendship".

[2] "Revolt of Islam," canto vii., stanza xxxiii.

time, and the world's natural sphere,"[1]—in the Ottoman Empire, or to the Czar, or to George III. Such truths were independent of time and place and circumstance; some time or other, something, or somebody (his faith was a little vague), would most certainly intervene to establish them. It was this placid undoubting confidence which irritated the positive and sceptical mind of Hazlitt. "The author of the 'Prometheus Unbound,'" he tells us, "has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional stamina, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

> 'And in its liquid texture mortal wound
> Receives no more than can the fluid air'.[2]

The shock of accident, the weight of authority, make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit; but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in 'seas of pearl and clouds of amber'. There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile, intellectual salt-of-tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with anything solid or anything lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities:—touch them and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind; and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling."[3] And so on with

[1] "Revolt of Islam," canto vii., stanza xxxi.

[2] "Paradise Lost," book vi.

[3] Essay "On Paradox and the Commonplace" in the *Table Talk*.

vituperation. No two characters could, indeed, be found more opposite than the open, eager, buoyant poet, and the dark, threatening, unbelieving critic.

It is difficult to say how far such a tendency under some circumstances might not have carried Shelley into positions most alien to an essential benevolence. It is most dangerous to be possessed with an idea. Dr. Arnold used to say that he had studied the life of Robespierre with the greatest personal benefit. No personal purity is a protection against insatiable zeal; it almost acts in the opposite direction. The less a man is conscious of inferior motives, the more likely is he to fancy that he is doing God service. There is no difficulty in imagining Shelley cast by the accident of fortune into the Paris of the Revolution; hurried on by its ideas, undoubting in its hopes, wild with its excitement, going forth in the name of freedom conquering and to conquer;—and who can think that he would have been scrupulous how he attained such an end? It was in him to have walked towards it over seas of blood. One could almost identify him with St. Just, "the fair-haired Republican".

On another and a more generally interesting topic, Shelley advanced a theory which amounts to a deification of impulse. "Love," he tells us, "is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness. Love withers under constraint; its very essence is liberty; it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear; it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve. . . . A husband and wife ought to continue united only so long as they love each other. Any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration. How odious an usurpation of the right of private judgment should that law be considered, which should make the ties of friendship indissoluble, in spite of the caprices, the inconstancy, the fallibility of the human mind! And by so much would the fetters of love be heavier and more unendurable than those of friendship, as love is more vehement and capricious, more dependent on those delicate peculiarities

of imagination, and less capable of reduction to the ostensible merits of the object." This passage, no doubt, is from an early and crude essay, one of the notes to "Queen Mab"; and there are many indications, in his latter years, that though he might hold in theory that "constancy has nothing virtuous in itself," yet in practice he shrank from breaking a tie hallowed by years of fidelity and sympathy. But, though his conduct was doubtless higher than his creed, there is no evidence that his creed was ever changed. The whole tone of his works is on the other side. The "Epipsychidion" could not have been written by a man who attached a moral value to constancy of mind. And the whole doctrine is most expressive of his character. A quivering sensibility endured only the essence of the most refined love. It is intelligible, that one who bowed in a moment to every desire should have attached a kind of consecration to the most pure and eager of human passions.

The evidence of Shelley's poems confirms this impression of him. The characters which he delineates have all this same kind of pure impulse. The reforming impulse is especially felt. In almost every one of his works there is some character, of whom all we know is, that he or she had this passionate disposition to reform mankind. We know nothing else about them, and they are all the same. Laon, in the "Revolt of Islam," does not differ at all from Lionel, in "Rosalind and Helen". Laon differs from Cythna, in the former poem, only as male from female. Lionel is delineated, though not with Shelley's greatest felicity, in a single passage:—

> "Yet through those dungeon-walls there came
> Thy thrilling light, O liberty!
> And as the meteor's midnight flame
> Startles the dreamer, sunlight truth
> Flashed on his visionary youth,
> And filled him, not with love, but faith,
> And hope, and courage, mute in death;
> For love and life in him were twins,
> Born at one birth: in every other
> First life, then love its course begins,
> Though they be children of one mother:

And so through this dark world they fleet
Divided, till in death they meet.
But he loved all things ever. Then
He passed amid the strife of men,
And stood at the throne of armed power
Pleading for a world of woe :
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro.
'Mid the passions wild of human-kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them ;
For, it was said, his words could bind
Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But is revenge, and fear, and pride.
Joyous he was, and hope and peace
On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As, where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver."

Such is the description of all his reformers in calm. In times of excitement they all burst forth—

" Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever,
Or the priests of the bloody faith ;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river
Whose waves they have tainted with death ;
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells :
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks in the surge of eternity ". [1]

In his more didactic poems it is the same. All the world is evil, and will be evil, until some unknown conqueror shall appear—a teacher by rhapsody and a conqueror by words—who shall at once reform all evil. Mathematicians place great reliance on the unknown symbol, great X. Shelley did more; he expected it would take life and reform our race. Such impersonations are, of course, not real men ; they are mere incarnations of a desire. Another passion, which no man has ever felt more strongly than Shelley—the desire to penetrate

[1] " Rosalind and Helen."

the mysteries of existence (by Hazlitt profanely called curiosity)—is depicted in "Alastor" as the sole passion of the only person in the poem :—

> "By solemn vision and bright silver dream
> His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
> And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
> Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
> The fountains of divine philosophy
> Fled not his thirsting lips ; and all of great,
> Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
> In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
> And knew. When early youth had past, he left
> His cold fire-side and alienated home
> To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
> Many a wild waste and tangled wilderness
> Has lured his fearless steps ; and he has bought
> With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,
> His rest and food."

He is cheered on his way by a beautiful dream, and the search to find it again mingles with the shadowy quest. It is remarkable how great is the superiority of the personification in "Alastor," though one of his earliest writings, over the reforming abstractions of his other works. The reason is, its far greater closeness to reality. The one is a description of what he was ; the other of what he desired to be. Shelley had nothing of the magic influence, the large insight, the bold strength, the permeating eloquence, which fit a man for a practical reformer : but he had, in perhaps an unequalled and unfortunate measure, the famine of the intellect—the daily insatiable craving after the highest truth which is the passion of "Alastor". So completely did he feel it, that the introductory lines of the poem almost seem to identify him with the hero ; at least they express sentiments which would have been exactly dramatic in his mouth :—

> "Mother of this unfathomable world !
> Favour my solemn song ; for I have loved
> Thee ever, and thee only ; I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed

In charnels and on coffins, where black Death
Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are. In lone and silent hours,
When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness;
Like an inspired and desperate alchymist,
Staking his very life on some dark hope,
Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks
With my most innocent love; until strange tears,
Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
Such magic as compels the charmed night
To render up thy charge . . . and though ne'er yet
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
Enough from incommunicable dream,
And twilight phantasms and deep noonday thought,
Has shone within me, that serenely now,
And moveless (as a long-forgotten lyre,
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fane),
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forests and the sea,
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man."

The accompaniments are fanciful; but the essential passion was his own.

These two forms of abstract personification exhaust all which can be considered characters among Shelley's poems —one poem excepted. Of course, all his works contain "Spirits," "Phantasms," "Dream No. 1," and "Fairy No. 3"; but these do not belong to this world. The higher air seems never to have been favourable to the production of marked character; with almost all poets the inhabitants of it are prone to a shadowy thinness: in Shelley, the habit of frequenting mountain-tops has reduced them to evanescent mists of lyrical energy. One poem of Shelley's, however, has two beings of another order; creations which, if not absolutely dramatic characters of the first class—not beings whom we know better than we know ourselves—are nevertheless very high specimens of the second; persons who seem

like vivid recollections from our intimate experience. In this case the dramatic execution is so good, that it is difficult to say why the results are not quite of the first rank. One reason of this is, perhaps, their extreme simplicity. Our imaginations, warned by consciousness and outward experience of the wonderful complexity of human nature, refuse to credit the existence of beings, all whose actions are unmodified consequences of a single principle. These two characters are Beatrice Cenci and her father Count Cenci. In most of Shelley's poems—he died under thirty—there is an extreme suspicion of aged persons. In actual life he had plainly encountered many old gentlemen who had no belief in the complete and philosophical reformation of mankind. There is, indeed, an old hermit in the "Revolt of Islam" who is praised (Captain Medwin identifies him with a Dr. Someone who was kind to Shelley at Eton); but in general the old persons in his poems are persons whose authority it is desirable to disprove:—

> "Old age, with its grey hair
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things
> And icy sneers, is naught".[1]

The less its influence, he evidently believes, the better. Not unnaturally, therefore, he selected for a tragedy a horrible subject from Italian story, in which an old man, accomplished in this world's learning, renowned for the "cynic sneer of o'er experienced sin," is the principal evil agent. The character of Count Cenci is that of a man who of set principle does evil for evil's sake. He loves "the sight of agony":—

> "All men delight in sensual luxury;
> All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel,
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain:
> But I delight in nothing else".

If he regrets his age, it is from the failing ability to do evil:—

[1] "Revolt of Islam," canto ii., stanza xxxiii.

> "True, I was happier than I am while yet
> Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
> While lust was sweeter than revenge: and now
> Invention palls".

It is this that makes him contemplate the violation of his daughter:—

> "There yet remains a deed to act,
> Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
> More dull than mine".

Shelley, though an habitual student of Plato—the greatest modern writer who has taken great pleasure in his writings—never seems to have read any treatise of Aristotle; otherwise he would certainly seem to have derived from that great writer the idea of the ἀκόλαστος; yet in reality the idea is as natural to Shelley as any man—more likely to occur to him than to most. Children think that everybody who is bad is very bad. Their simple eager disposition only understands the doing what they wish to do; they do not refine: if they hear of a man doing evil, they think he wishes to do it,—that he has a special impulse to do evil, as they have to do what they do. Something like this was the case with Shelley. His mind, impulsive and childlike, could not imagine the struggling kind of character—either those which struggle with their lower nature and conquer, or those which struggle and are vanquished—either the ἐγκρατής or the ἀκρατής of the old thinker; but he could comprehend that which is in reality far worse than either, the being who wishes to commit sin because it is sin, who is as it were possessed with a demon hurrying him out, hot and passionate, to vice and crime. The innocent child is whirled away by one impulse; the passionate reformer by another; the essential criminal, if such a being be possible, by a third. They are all beings, according to one division, of the same class. An imaginative mind like Shelley's, belonging to the second of these types, naturally is prone in some moods to embody itself under the forms of the third. It is, as it were, the antithesis to itself.—Equally simple is the other character—that of Beatrice. Even before her violation, by a graphic

touch of art, she is described as absorbed, or beginning to be absorbed, in the consciousness of her wrongs.

> "*Beatrice.* As I have said, speak to me not of love.
> Had you a dispensation, I have not;
> Nor will I leave this home of misery
> Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
> To whom I owe life and these virtuous thoughts,
> Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
> Alas, Orsino! all the love that once
> I felt for you is turned to bitter pain,
> Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
> Broke by assuming vows no Pope will loose:
> And yet I love you still, but holily,
> Even as a sister or a spirit might;
> And so I swear a cold fidelity."

After her violation, her whole being is absorbed by one thought,—how and by what subtle vengeance she can expiate the memory of her shame. These are all the characters in Shelley; an impulsive unity is of the essence of them all.

The same characteristic of Shelley's temperament produced also most marked effects on his speculative opinions. The peculiarity of his creed early brought him into opposition to the world. His education seems to have been principally directed by his father, of whom the only description which has reached us is not favourable. Sir Timothy Shelley, according to Captain Medwin, was an illiterate country gentleman of an extinct race; he had been at Oxford, where he learned nothing, had made the grand tour, from which he brought back "a smattering of bad French and a bad picture of an eruption at Vesuvius". He had the air of the old school, and the habit of throwing it off which distinguished that school. Lord Chesterfield himself was not easier on matters of morality. He used to tell his son that he would provide for natural children *ad infinitum*, but would never forgive his making a *mésalliance*. On religion his opinions were very lax. He, indeed, "required his servants," we are told, "to attend church," and even on rare occasions, with superhuman virtue, attended himself; but there, as with others of that generation, his religion ended. He doubtless did not

feel that any more could be required of him. He was not consciously insincere; but he did not in the least realise the opposition between the religion which he professed and the conduct which he pursued. Such a person was not likely to influence a morbidly sincere imaginative nature in favour of the doctrines of the Church of England. Shelley went from Eton, where he had been singular, to Oxford, where he was more so. He was a fair classical scholar. But his real mind was given to out-of-school knowledge. He had written a novel; he had studied chemistry; when pressed in argument, he used to ask: "What, then, does Condorcet say upon the subject?" This was not exactly the youth for the University of Oxford in the year 1810. A distinguished pupil of that University once observed to us: "The use of the University of Oxford is, that no one can over-read himself there. The appetite for knowledge is repressed. A blight is thrown over the ingenuous mind," etc. And possibly it may be so; considering how small a space literary knowledge fills in the busy English world, it may not be without its advantages that any mind prone to bookish enthusiasm should be taught by the dryness of its appointed studies, the want of sympathy of its teachers, and a rough contact with average English youth, that studious enthusiasm must be its own reward; that in this country it will meet with little other; that it will not be encouraged in high places. Such discipline may, however, be carried too far. A very enthusiastic mind may possibly by it be turned in upon itself. This was the case with Shelley. When he first came up to Oxford, physics were his favourite pursuit. On chemistry, especially, he used to be eloquent. "The galvanic battery," said he, "is a new engine. It has been used hitherto to an insignificant extent: yet it has worked wonders already. What will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates, effect?" Nature, however, like the world, discourages a wild enthusiasm. "His chemical operations seemed to an unskilful observer to promise nothing but disasters. He had blown himself up at Eton. He had inadvertently swallowed some mineral poison, which he declared had seriously injured

his health, and from the effects of which he should never recover. His hands, his clothes, his books, and his furniture, were stained and covered by medical acids," and so on. Disgusted with these and other failures, he abandoned physics for metaphysics. He rushed headlong into the form of philosophy then popular. It is not likely that he ever read Locke; and it is easy to imagine the dismay with which the philosopher would have regarded so "heady and skittish" a disciple: but he continually invoked Locke as an authority, and was really guided by the French expositions of him then popular. Hume, of course, was not without his influence. With such teachers only to control him, an excitable poet rushed in a moment to materialism, and thence to atheism. Deriving any instruction from the University, was, according to him, absurd; he wished to convert the University. He issued a kind of thesis, stating by way of interrogatory all the difficulties of the subject; called it the "necessity of atheism," and sent it to the professors, heads of houses, and several bishops. The theistic belief of his college was equal to the occasion. "It was a fine spring morning on Lady Day in the year 1811, when," says a fellow-student, "I went to Shelley's rooms. He was absent; but before I had collected our books, he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened. 'I am expelled.' He then explained that he had been summoned before the Master and some of the Fellows; that as he was unable to deny the authorship of the essay, he had been expelled and ordered to quit the college the next morning at latest." He had wished to be put on his trial more regularly, and stated to the Master that England was a "free country"; but without effect. He was obliged to leave Oxford; his father was very angry; "if he had broken the Master's windows, one could have understood it": but to be expelled for publishing a *book* seemed an error incorrigible, because incomprehensible.

These details at once illustrate Shelley's temperament, and enable us to show that the peculiarity of his opinions arose out of that temperament. He was placed in circumstances which left his eager mind quite free. Of his father we have already

spoken: there was no one else to exercise a subduing or guiding influence over him; nor would his mind have naturally been one extremely easy to influence. Through life he followed very much his own bent and his own thoughts. His most intimate associates exercised very little control over his belief. He followed his nature; and that nature was in a singular degree destitute of certain elements which most materially guide ordinary men. It seems most likely that a person prone to isolated impulse will be defective in the sensation of conscience. There is scarcely room for it. When, as in common conflicting characters, the whole nature is daily and hourly in a perpetual struggle, the faculty which decides what elements in that nature are to have the supremacy is daily and hourly appealed to. Passions are contending; life is a discipline; there is a reference every moment to the directory of the discipline—the order-book of the passions. In temperaments not exposed to the ordinary struggle there is no such necessity. Their impulse guides them; they have little temptation; are scarcely under the law; have hardly occasion to consult the statute-book. In consequence, simple and beautiful as such minds often are, they are deficient in the sensation of duty; have no haunting idea of right or wrong; show an easy *abandon* in place of a severe self-scrutiny. At first it might seem that such minds lose little; they are exempted from the consciousness of a code to whose provisions they need little access. But such would be the conclusion only from a superficial view of human nature. The whole of our inmost faith is a series of intuitions; and experience seems to show that the intuitions of conscience are the beginning of that series. Childhood has little which can be called a religion; the shows of this world, the play of its lights and shadows, suffice. It is in the collision of our nature, which occurs in youth, that the first real sensation of faith is felt. Conscience is often then morbidly acute; a flush passes over the youthful mind; the guiding instinct is keen and strong, like the passions with which it contends. At the first struggle of our nature commences our religion. Childhood will utter the words; in early manhood, when we become half-unwilling to utter them, they begin to have a meaning.

The result of history is similar. The whole of religion rests on a faith that the universe is solely ruled by an almighty and all-perfect Being. This strengthens with the moral cultivation, and grows with the improvement of mankind. It is the assumed axiom of the creed of Christendom; and all that is really highest in our race may have the degree of its excellence tested by the degree of the belief in it. But experience shows that the belief only grows very gradually. We see at various times, and now, vast outlying nations in whom the conviction of morality—the consciousness of a law—is but weak; and there the belief in an all-perfect God is half-forgotten, faint, and meagre. It exists as something between a tradition and a speculation; but it does not come forth on the solid earth; it has no place in the "business and bosoms"[1] of men; it is thrust out of view even when we look upwards by fancied idols and dreams of the stars in their courses. Consider the state of the Jewish, as compared with the better part of the pagan world of old. On the one side we see civilisation, commerce, the arts, a great excellence in all the exterior of man's life; a sort of morality sound and sensible, placing the good of man in a balanced moderation within and good looks without;—in a combination of considerate good sense, with the *air* of aristocratic, or, as it was said, "godlike" refinement. We see, in a word, civilisation, and the ethics of civilisation; the first polished, the other elaborated and perfected. But this is all; we do not see faith. We see in some quarters rather a horror of the *curiosus deus* interfering, controlling, watching—never letting things alone—disturbing the quiet of the world with punishment and the fear of punishment. The Jewish side of the picture is different. We see a people who have perhaps an inaptitude for independent civilisation, who in secular pursuits have only been assistants and attendants on other nations during the whole history of mankind. These have no equable, beautiful morality like the others; but instead a gnawing, abiding, depressing—one might say, a slavish—ceremonial, excessive sense of law and duty. This nation has faith. By a link not logical, but ethical, this intense, eating, abiding, supremacy of

[1] Bacon: Dedication to *Essays*.

conscience is connected with a deep daily sense of a watchful, governing, and jealous God. And from the people of the law arises the gospel. The sense of duty, when awakened, awakens not only the religion of the law, but in the end the other religious intuitions which lie round about it. The faith of Christendom has arisen not from a great people, but from "the least of all people,"—from the people whose anxious legalism was a noted contrast to the easy, impulsive life of pagan nations. In modern language, conscience is the *converting* intuition,—that which turns men from the world without to that within,—from the things which are seen to the realities which are not seen. In a character like Shelley's, where this haunting, abiding, oppressive moral feeling is wanting or defective, the religious belief in an Almighty God which springs out of it is likely to be defective likewise.

In Shelley's case this deficiency was aggravated by what may be called the abstract character of his intellect. We have shown that no character except his own, and characters most strictly allied to his own, are delineated in his works. The tendency of his mind was rather to personify isolated qualities or impulses—equality, liberty, revenge, and so on—than to create out of separate parts or passions the single conception of an entire character. This is, properly speaking, the mythological tendency. All early nations show this marked disposition to conceive of separate forces and qualities as a kind of semi-persons; that is, not true actual persons with distinct characters, but beings who guide certain influences, and of whom all we know is that they guide those influences. Shelley evinces a remarkable tendency to deal with mythology in this simple and elementary form. Other poets have breathed into mythology a modern life; have been attracted by those parts which seem to have a religious meaning, and have enlarged that meaning while studying to embody it. With Shelley it is otherwise; the parts of mythology by which he is attracted are the bare parts—the simple stories which Dr. Johnson found so tedious:—

"Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acroceraunian mountains.
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains,
She leapt down the rocks
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams;
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine,
Which slopes to the western gleams
And gliding and springing,
She went ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The earth seemed to love her,
And heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.
Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook,"
Etc., etc.[1]

Arethusa and Alpheus are not characters: they are only the spirits of the fountain and the stream. When not writing on topics connected with ancient mythology, Shelley shows the same bent. "The Cloud" and "The Skylark" are more like mythology—have more of the impulse by which the populace, if we may so say, of the external world was first fancied into existence—than any other modern poems. There is, indeed, no habit of mind more remote from our solid and matter-of-fact existence; none which was once powerful, of which the present traces are so rare. In truth, Shelley's imagination achieved all it could with the materials before it. The materials for the creative faculty must be provided by the receptive faculty. Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities. The memory of Shelley had no heaped-up "store of life," no vast accumulation of familiar characters. His intellect did not tend to the strong grasp of realities; its taste was rather

[1] "Arethusa."

for the subtle refining of theories, the distilling of exquisite abstractions. His imagination personified what his understanding presented to it. It had nothing else to do. He displayed the same tendency of mind—sometimes negatively and sometimes positively—in his professedly religious inquiries. His belief went through three stages—first, materialism, then a sort of Nihilism, then a sort of Platonism. In neither of them is the rule of the universe ascribed to a character: in the first and last it is ascribed to animated abstractions; in the second there is no universe at all. In neither of them is there any strong grasp of fact. The writings of the first period are clearly influenced by, and modelled on, Lucretius. He held the same abstract theory of nature—sometimes of half-personified atoms, moving hither and thither of themselves—at other times of a general pervading spirit of nature, holding the same relation to nature, as a visible object, that Arethusa the goddess bears to Arethusa the stream:—

"The magic car moved on.
As they approached their goal
The coursers seemed to gather speed:
The sea no longer was distinguished; earth
Appeared a vast and shadowy sphere:
The sun's unclouded orb
Rolled through the black concave;
Its rays of rapid light
Parted around the chariot's swifter course,
And fell like ocean's feathery spray
Dashed from the boiling surge
Before a vessel's prow.

"The magic car moved on.
Earth's distant orb appeared
The smallest light that twinkles in the heavens:
Whilst round the chariot's way
Innumerable systems rolled,
And countless spheres diffused
An ever-varying glory.
It was a sight of wonder: some
Were horned like the crescent moon;
Some shed a mild and silver beam
Like Hesperus o'er the western sea;

Some dash'd athwart with trains of flame,
Like worlds to death and ruin driven;
Some shone like stars, and, as the chariot passed,
Bedimmed all other light.

"Spirit of Nature! here,
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,—
Here is thy fitting temple.
Yet not the slightest leaf
That quivers to the passing breeze
Is less instinct with thee;
Yet not the meanest worm
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
Less shares thy eternal breath.
Spirit of Nature! thou,
Imperishable as this glorious scene,—
Here is thy fitting temple."[1]

And he copied not only the opinions of Lucretius, but also his tone. Nothing is more remarkable than that two poets of the first rank should have felt a bounding joy in the possession of opinions which, if true, ought, one would think, to move an excitable nature to the keenest and deepest melancholy. That this life is all, that there is no God, but only atoms and a moulding breath, are singular doctrines to be accepted with joy: they only could have been so accepted by wild minds bursting with imperious energy, knowing of no law, "wreaking thoughts upon expression" of which they knew neither the meaning nor the result. From this stage Shelley's mind passed to another; but not immediately to one of greater belief. On the contrary, it was the doctrine of Hume which was called in to expel the doctrine of Epicurus. His previous teachers had taught him that there was nothing except matter: the Scotch sceptic met him at that point with the question—Is matter certain? Hume, as is well known, adopted the negative part from the theory of materialism and the theory of immaterialism, but rejected the positive side of both. He held, or professed to hold, that there was no substantial thing, either matter or mind; but only "sensations and impressions" flying

[1] "Queen Mab."

about the universe, inhering in nothing and going nowhere. These, he said, were the only subjects of consciousness; all you felt was your feeling, and all your thought was your thought; the rest was only hypothesis. The notion that there was any "*you*" at all was a theory generally current among mankind, but not, unless proved, to be accepted by the philosopher. This doctrine, though little agreeable to the world in general, has an excellence in the eyes of youthful disputants; it is a doctrine which no one will admit, and which no one can disprove. Shelley accordingly accepted it; indeed it was a better description of his universe than of most people's; his mind was filled with a swarm of ideas, fancies, thoughts, streaming on without his volition; without plan or order. He might be pardoned for fancying that they were all; he could not see the outward world for them; their giddy passage occupied him till he forgot himself. He has put down the theory in its barest form: "The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life which, though startling to the apprehension, is, in fact, that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived."[1] And again: "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words, *I*, *you*, *they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption that I, the person who

[1] "On Life," in *Essays*.

now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words, *I*, and *you*, and *they*, are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual philosophy has conducted us. We are on that verge where words abandon us; and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know!"[1] On his wild nerves these speculations produced a great effect. Their thin acuteness excited his intellect; their blank result appalled his imagination. He was obliged to pause in the last fragment of one of his metaphysical papers, "dizzy from thrilling horror". In this state of mind he began to study Plato; and it is probable that in the whole library of philosophy there is no writer so suitable to such a reader. A common modern author, believing in mind and matter, he would have put aside at once as loose and popular. He was attracted by a writer who, like himself, in some sense did not believe in either—who supplied him with subtle realities different from either, at once to be extracted by his intellect and to be glorified by his imagination. The theory of Plato, that the all-apparent phenomena were unreal, he believed already; he had a craving to believe in something noble, beautiful, and difficult to understand; he was ready, therefore, to accept the rest of that theory, and to believe that these passing phenomena were imperfect types and resemblances—imperfect incarnations, so to speak—of certain immovable, eternal, archetypal realities. All his later writings are coloured by that theory, though in some passages the remains of the philosophy of the senses with which he commenced appear in odd proximity to the philosophy of abstractions with which he concluded. There is, perhaps, no allusion in Shelley to the *Phædrus;* but no one can doubt which of Plato's ideas would be most attractive to the nature we have described. The most valuable part of Plato he did not comprehend. There is in Shelley none of that unceasing reference to ethical consciousness and ethical religion which

[1] "On Life," in *Essays.*

has for centuries placed Plato first among the preparatory preceptors of Christianity. The general doctrine is that—

> "The one remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity,
> Until death tramples it to fragments".[1]

The particular worship of the poet is paid to that one spirit whose—

> "Plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the heaven's light".[2]

It is evident that not even in this, the highest form of creed to which he ever clearly attained, is there any such distinct conception of a character as is essential to a real religion. The conception of God is not to be framed out of a single attribute. Shelley has changed the "idea" of beauty into a spirit, and this probably for the purposes of poetry; he has given it life and animal motion; but he has done no more; the "spirit" has no will, and no virtue: it is animated, but unholy; alive, but unmoral: it is an object of intense admiration; it is not an object of worship.

We have ascribed this quality of Shelley's writings to an abstract intellect; and in part, no doubt, correctly. Shelley had, probably by nature, such an intellect; it was self-enclosed, self-absorbed, teeming with singular ideas, remote from character and life; but so involved is human nature, that this tendency to abstraction, which we have spoken of as aggravating the consequences of his simple impulsive temperament, was itself aggravated by that temperament. It is a received opinion in metaphysics, that the idea of personality is identical with the idea of will. A distinguished French writer has accurately expressed this: "Le pouvoir," says M. Jouffroy, "que l'homme

[1] "Adonais," stanza lii. [2] *Ibid.*, stanza xliii.

a de s'emparer de ses capacités naturelles et de les diriger fait de lui une *personne;* et c'est parce que les *choses* n'exercent pas ce pouvoir en elles-mêmes, qu'elles ne sont que des choses. Telle est la véritable différence qui distingue les choses des personnes. Toutes les natures possibles sont douées de certaines capacités; mais les unes ont reçu par-dessus les autres le privilége de se saisir d'elles-mêmes et de se gouverner: celles-là sont les personnes. Les autres en ont été privées, en sorte qu'elles n'ont point de part à ce qui se fait en elles: celles-là sont les choses. Leurs capacités ne s'en développent pas moins, mais c'est exclusivement selon les lois auxquelles Dieu les a soumises. C'est Dieu qui gouverne en elles; il est la personne des choses, comme l'ouvrier est la personne de la montre. Ici la personne est hors de l'être; dans le sein même des choses, comme dans le sein de la montre, la personne ne se rencontre pas; on ne trouve qu'une série de capacités qui se meuvent aveuglément, sans que le nature qui en est douée sache même ce qu'elles font. Aussi ne peut-on demander compte aux choses de ce qui se fait en elles; il faut s'adresser à Dieu: comme on s'adresse à l'ouvrier et non à la montre, quand la montre va mal." And if this theory be true—and doubtless it is an approximation to the truth—it is evident that a mind ordinarily moved by simple impulse will have little distinct consciousness of personality. While thrust forward by such impulse, it is a mere instrument. Outward things set it in motion. It goes where they bid; it exerts no will upon them; it is, to speak expressively, a mere conducting thing. When such a mind is free from such impulse, there is even less will; thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, pass before it in a sort of dream. For the time it is a mere perceiving thing. In neither case is there a trace of voluntary character. If we want a reason for anything, "il faut s'adresser à Dieu".

Shelley's political opinions were likewise the effervescence of his peculiar nature. The love of liberty is peculiarly natural to the simple impulsive mind. It feels irritated at the idea of a law; it fancies it does not need it: it really needs it less than other minds. Government seems absurd—society an incubus. It has hardly patience to estimate particular institu-

tions; it wants to begin again—to make a *tabula rasa* of all which men have created or devised; for they seem to have been constructed on a false system, for an object it does not understand. On this *tabula rasa* Shelley's abstract imagination proceeded to set up arbitrary monstrosities of "equality" and "love," which never will be realised among the children of men.

Such a mind is clearly driven to self-delineation. Nature, no doubt, in some sense remains to it. A dreamy mind—a mind occupied intensely with its own thoughts—will often have a peculiarly intense apprehension of anything which by the hard collision of the world it has been forced to observe. The scene stands out alone in the memory; is a refreshment from hot thoughts; grows with the distance of years. A mind like Shelley's, deeply susceptible to all things beautiful, has many pictures and images shining in its recollection which it recurs to, and which it is ever striving to delineate. Indeed, in such minds it is rather the picture in their mind which they describe than the original object; the "ideation," as some harsh metaphysicians call it, rather than the reality. A certain dream-light is diffused over it; a wavering touch, as of interfering fancy or fading recollection. The landscape has not the hues of the real world; it is modified in the *camera obscura* of the self-enclosed intelligence. Nor can such a mind long endure the cold process of external delineation. Its own hot thoughts rush in; its favourite topic is itself and them. Shelley, indeed, as we observed before, carries this to an extent which no poet probably ever equalled. He described not only his character but his circumstances. We know that this is so in a large number of passages; if his poems were commented on by some one thoroughly familiar with the events of his life, we should doubtless find that it was so in many more. On one strange and painful scene his fancy was continually dwelling. In a gentle moment we have a dirge:—

"The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
And the year
On the earth her deathbed, in a shroud of leaves, dead
Is lying.

Come months, come away,
From November to May,
In your saddest array ;
Follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And like dim shadows watch by her sepulchre.

The chill rain is falling, the nipt worm is crawling,
The rivers are swelling, the thunder is knelling ;
For the year ;
The blithe swallows are flown, and the lizards each gone
To his dwelling.
Come months, come away ;
Put on white, black, and grey ;
Let your light sisters play—
Ye, follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And make her grave green with tear on tear." [1]

In a frenzied mood he breaks forth into wildness :—

" She is still, she is cold
On the bridal couch ;
One step to the white deathbed,
And one to the bier,
And one to the charnel—and one, O, where ?
The dark arrow fled
In the noon.

" Ere the sun through heaven once more has roll'd,
The rats in her heart
Will have made their nest,
And the worms be alive in her golden hair ;
While the spirit that guides the sun
Sits throned in his flaming chair,
She shall sleep." [2]

There is no doubt that these and a hundred other similar passages allude to the death of his first wife; as melancholy a story as ever shivered the nerves of an excitable being. The facts are hardly known to us, but they are something like these: In very early youth Shelley had formed a half-fanciful attachment to a cousin, a Miss Harriet Grove, who is said to have been attractive, and to whom, certainly, his fancy often went back in later and distant years. How deep the feeling

[1] Autumn. [2] Dirge at the close of " Ginevra ".

was on either side we do not know; she seems to have taken an interest in the hot singular dreams which occupied his mind —except only where her image might intrude—from which one might conjecture that she took unusual interest in him; she even wrote some chapters, or parts of some, in one of his boyish novels, and her parents doubtless thought the "Rosicrucian" could be endured, as Shelley was the heir to land and a baronetcy. His expulsion from Oxford altered all this. Probably he had always among his friends been thought "a singular young man," and they had waited in perplexity to see if the oddness would turn to unusual good or unusual evil. His atheistic treatise and its results seemed to show clearly the latter, and all communication with Miss Grove was instantly forbidden him. What she felt on the subject is not told us; probably some theistic and undreaming lover intervened, for she married in a short time. The despair of an excitable poet at being deprived of his mistress at the same moment that he was abandoned by his family, and in a measure by society, may be fancied, though it cannot be known. Captain Medwin observes: "Shelley, on this trying occasion, had the courage to live, in order that he might labour for one great object—the advancement of the human race, and the amelioration of society; and strengthened himself in a resolution to devote his energies to his ultimate end, being prepared to endure every obloquy, to make every sacrifice for its accomplishment: and would," such is the Captain's English, "if necessary, have died in the cause". It does not appear, however, that disappointed love took solely the very unusual form of philanthropy. By chance, whether with or without leave does not appear, he went to see his second sister, who was at school at a place called Balham Hill, near London; and, while walking in the garden with her, "a Miss Westbrook passed them". She was a "handsome blonde young lady, nearly sixteen"; and Shelley was much struck. He found out that her name was "Harriett,"—as he, after his marriage, anxiously expresses it, with two t's, "Harriett";—and he fell in love at once. She had the name of his first love; "fairer, though yet the same". After his manner, he wrote to her immediately. He was in

the habit of doing this to people who interested him, either in his own or under an assumed name: and once, Captain Medwin says, carried on a long correspondence with Mrs. Hemans, then Miss Brown, under his (the captain's) name; but which he, the deponent, was not permitted to peruse. In Miss Westbrook's case the correspondence had a more serious consequence. Of her character we can only guess a little. She was, we think, an ordinary blooming young lady of sixteen. Shelley was an extraordinary young man of nineteen, rather handsome, very animated, and expressing his admiration a little intensely. He was doubtless much the most aristocratic person she had ever spoken to; for her father was a retired innkeeper, and Shelley had always the air of a man of birth. There is a vision, too, of an elder sister, who made "Harriett dear" very uncomfortable. On the whole, the result may be guessed. At the end of August, 1811, we do not know the precise day, they were married at Gretna Green. Jests may be made on it; but it was no laughing matter in the life of the wife or the husband. Of the lady's disposition and mind we know nothing, except from Shelley; a medium which must, under the circumstances, be thought a distorting one. We should conclude that she was capable of making many people happy, though not of making Shelley happy. There is an ordinance of nature at which men of genius are perpetually fretting, but which does more good than many laws of the universe which they praise: it is, that ordinary women ordinarily prefer ordinary men. "Genius," as Hazlitt would have said, "puts them out." It is so strange; it does not come into the room as usual; it says "such things": once it forgot to brush its hair. The common female mind prefers usual tastes, settled manners, customary conversation, defined and practical pursuits. And it is a great good that it should be so. Nature has no wiser instinct. The average woman suits the average man; good health, easy cheerfulness, common charms, suffice. If Miss Westbrook had married an everyday person—a gentleman, suppose, in the tallow line—she would have been happy, and have made him happy. Her mind could have understood his life; her society would have been a gentle relief from unodoriferous

pursuits. She had nothing in common with Shelley. His mind was full of eager thoughts, wild dreams, singular aspirations. The most delicate tact would probably have often failed, the nicest sensibility would have been jarred, affection would have erred, in dealing with such a being. A very peculiar character was required, to enter into such a rare union of curious qualities. Some eccentric men of genius have, indeed, felt in the habitual tact and serene nothingness of ordinary women, a kind of trust and calm. They have admired an instinct of the world which they had not—a repose of mind they could not share. But this is commonly in later years. A boy of twenty thinks he knows the world; he is too proud and happy in his own eager and shifting thoughts, to wish to contrast them with repose. The commonplaceness of life goads him: placid society irritates him. Bread is an incumbrance; upholstery tedious; he craves excitement; he wishes to reform mankind. You cannot convince him it is right to sow, in a world so full of sorrow and evil. Shelley was in this state; he hurried to and fro over England, pursuing theories, and absorbed in plans. He was deep in metaphysics; had subtle disproofs of all religion; wrote several poems, which would have been a puzzle to a very clever young lady. There were pecuniary difficulties besides: neither of the families had approved of the match, and neither were inclined to support the household. Altogether, no one can be surprised that in less than three years the hasty union ended in a "separation by mutual consent". The wonder is that it lasted so long. What her conduct was after the separation, is not very clear: there were "reports" about her at Bath—perhaps a loquacious place. She was not twenty, probably handsome, and not improbably giddy: being quite without evidence, we cannot judge what was rumour and what was truth. Shelley has not left us in similar doubt. After a year or two he travelled abroad with Mary, afterwards the second Mrs. Shelley, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin—names most celebrated in those times, and even now known for their anti-matrimonial speculations. Of their "six weeks'" tour abroad, in the year 1816, a record remains, and should be

read by any persons who wish to learn what travelling was in its infancy. It was the year when the Continent was first thrown open to English travellers; and few probably adopted such singular means of locomotion as Shelley and his companions. First they tried walking, and had a very small ass to carry their portmanteau; then they tried a mule; then a *fiacre*, which drove away from them; afterwards they came to a raft. It was not, however, an unamusing journey. At an ugly and out-of-the-way château, near Brunen, Shelley began a novel, to be called *The Assassins*, which he never finished —probably never continued—after his return; but which still remains, and is one of the most curious and characteristic specimens of his prose style. It was a refreshing intellectual tour; one of the most pleasant rambles of his life. On his return he was met by painful intelligence. His wife had destroyed herself. Of her state of mind we have again no evidence. She is said to have been deeply affected by the "reports" to which we have alluded; but whatever it was, Shelley felt himself greatly to blame. He had been instrumental in first dividing her from her family; had connected himself with her in a wild contract, from which neither could ever be set free; if he had not crossed her path, she might have been happy in her own way and in her own sphere. All this preyed upon his mind, and it is said he became mad; and whether or not his horror and pain went the length of actual frenzy, they doubtless approached that border-line of suffering excitement which divides the most melancholy form of sanity from the most melancholy form of insanity. In several poems he seems to delineate himself in the guise of a maniac:—

> "'Of his sad history
> I know but this,' said Maddalo; 'he came
> To Venice a dejected man, and fame
> Said he was wealthy, or he had been so.
> Some thought the loss of fortune wrought him woe;
> But he was ever talking in such sort
> As you do,—but more sadly: he seem'd hurt,
> Even as a man with his peculiar wrong,
> To hear but of the oppression of the strong,
> Or those absurd deceits (I think with you

In some respects, you know) which carry through
The excellent impostors of this earth
When they outface detection. He had worth,
Poor fellow! but a humourist in his way.'—

—'Alas, what drove him mad?'

'I cannot say:
A lady came with him from France; and when
She left him and returned, he wander'd then
About yon lonely isles of desert sand
Till he grew wild. He had no cash nor land
Remaining:—the police had brought him here—
Some fancy took him, and he would not bear
Removal; so I fitted up for him
Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim;
And sent him busts, and books, and urns for flowers,
Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
And instruments of music. You may guess,
A stranger could do little more or less
For one so gentle and unfortunate—
And those are his sweet strains, which charm the weight
From madmen's chains, and make this hell appear
A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear.'

'Nay, this was kind of you,—he had no claim,
As the world says.'

'None but the very same,
Which I on all mankind, were I, as he,
Fall'n to such deep reverse. His melody
Is interrupted; now we hear the din
Of madmen, shriek on shriek, again begin;
Let us now visit him: after this strain
He ever communes with himself again,
And sees and hears not any.'

Having said
These words, we called the keeper; and he led
To an apartment opening on the sea—
There the poor wretch was sitting mournfully
Near a piano, his pale fingers twined
One with the other; and the ooze and wind
Rushed through an open casement, and did sway
His hair, and starred it with the brackish spray:
His head was leaning on a music-book,
And he was muttering; and his lean limbs shook;
His lips were pressed against a folded leaf,

In hue too beautiful for health, and grief
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart,
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart
The eloquence of passion: soon he raised
His sad meek face, and eyes lustrous and glazed,
And spoke,—sometimes as one who wrote and thought
His words might move some heart that heeded not,
If sent to distant lands;—and then as one
Reproaching deeds never to be undone,
With wondering self-compassion; then his speech
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each
Unmodulated and expressionless,—
But that from one jarred accent you might guess
It was despair made them so uniform:
And all the while the loud and gusty storm
Hissed through the window; and we stood behind,
Stealing his accents from the envious wind,
Unseen. I yet remember what he said
Distinctly—such impression his words made!"[1]

And casual illustrations—unconscious metaphors, showing a terrible familiarity—are borrowed from insanity in his subsequent works.

This strange story is in various ways deeply illustrative of his character. It shows how the impulsive temperament, not definitely intending evil, is hurried forward, so to say, *over* actions and crimes which would seem to indicate deep depravity—which would do so in ordinary human nature, but which do not indicate in it anything like the same degree of guilt. Driven by singular passion across a tainted region, it retains no taint; on a sudden it passes through evil, but preserves its purity. So curious is this character, that a record of its actions may read like a libel on its life.

To some the story may also suggest whether Shelley's nature was one of those most adapted for love in its highest form. It is impossible to deny that he loved with a great intensity; yet it was with a certain narrowness, and therefore a certain fitfulness. Possibly a somewhat wider nature, taking hold of other characters at more points,—fascinated as intensely, but more variously,—stirred as deeply, but

[1] "Julian and Maddalo."

through more complicated emotions,—is requisite for the highest and most lasting feeling. Passion, to be enduring, must be many-sided. Eager and narrow emotions urge like the gadfly of the poet: but they pass away; they are single; there is nothing to revive them. Various as human nature must be the passion which absorbs that nature into itself. Shelley's mode of delineating women has a corresponding peculiarity. They are well described; but they are described under only one aspect. Every one of his poems almost has a lady whose arms are white, whose mind is sympathising, and whose soul is beautiful. She has many names—Cythna, Asia, Emily;[1] but these are only external disguises; she is indubitably the same person, for her character never varies. No character can be simpler. She is described as the ideal object of love in its most simple and elemental form; the pure object of the essential passion. She is a being to be loved in a single moment, with eager eyes and gasping breath; but you feel that in that moment you have seen the whole. There is nothing to come to afterwards. The fascination is intense, but uniform. There is not the ever-varying grace, the ever-changing expression of the unchanging charm, that alone can attract for all time the shifting moods of a various and mutable nature.

The works of Shelley lie in a confused state, like the *disjecta membra* of the poet of our boyhood. They are in the strictest sense "remains". It is absurd to expect from a man who died at thirty a long work of perfected excellence. All which at so early an age can be expected are fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations. Of these Shelley has written some that are nearly, and one or two perhaps that are quite, perfect. But he has not done more. It would have been better if he had not attempted so much. He would have done well to have heeded Goethe's caution to Eckerman: "Beware of attempting a large work. If you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it, all other thoughts are repelled, and the pleasantness of life itself is for the time lost. What exertion and expenditure

[1] "Revolt of Islam"; "Prometheus Unbound"; "Epipsychidion".

of mental force are required to arrange and round off a great whole; and then what powers, and what a tranquil undisturbed situation in life, to express it with the proper fluency! If you have erred as to the whole, all your toil is lost; and further, if, in treating so extensive a subject, you are not perfectly master of your material in the details, the whole will be defective, and censure will be incurred." Shelley did not know this. He was ever labouring at long poems: but he has scarcely left one which, as a whole, is worthy of him; you can point to none and say, This is Shelley. Even had he lived to an age of riper capacity, it may be doubted if a being so discontinuous, so easily hurried to and fro, would have possessed the settled, undeviating self-devotion that is necessary to a long and perfect composition. He had not, like Goethe, the cool shrewdness to watch for inspiration.

His success, as we have said, is in fragments; and the best of those fragments are lyrical. The very same isolation and suddenness of impulse which rendered him unfit for the composition of great works, rendered him peculiarly fit to pour forth on a sudden the intense essence of peculiar feeling "in profuse strains of unpremeditated art". Lord Macaulay has said that the words "bard" and "inspiration," generally so meaningless when applied to modern poets, have a meaning when applied to Shelley. An idea, an emotion grew upon his brain, his breast heaved, his frame shook, his nerves quivered with the "harmonious madness" of imaginative concentration. "Poetry," he himself tells us, "is not, like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person,

sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it." [1] In verse, Shelley has compared the skylark to a poet; we may turn back the description on his own art and his own mind:—

" Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

" All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

" What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow-clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

. . . . . .

" Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

" Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aërial hue
Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view.

[1] " A Defence of Poetry," in his *Essays*.

"Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves.

"Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass."

In most poets unearthly beings are introduced to express peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture; but they are generally failures. Lord Byron tried this kind of composition in "Manfred," and the result is an evident failure. In Shelley, such singing solitary beings are almost uniformly successful; while writing, his mind really for the moment was in the state in which theirs is supposed always to be. He loved attenuated ideas and abstracted excitement. In expressing their nature he had but to set free his own.

Human nature is not, however, long equal to this sustained effort of remote excitement. The impulse fails, imagination fades, inspiration dies away. With the skylark it is well:—

"With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety".

But in unsoaring human nature languor comes, fatigue palls, melancholy oppresses, melody dies away. The universe is not all blue sky; there is the thick fog and the heavy earth. "The world," says Mr. Emerson, "is mundane." A creeping sense of weight is part of the most aspiring nature. To the most thrilling rapture succeeds despondency, perhaps pain. To Shelley this was peculiarly natural. His dreams of reform, of a world which was to be, called up the imaginative ecstasy: his soul bounded forward into the future; but it is not possible even to the most abstracted and excited mind to place its happiness in the expected realisation of impossible schemes, and yet not occasionally be uncertain

of those schemes. The rigid frame of society, the heavy heap of traditional institutions, the solid slowness of ordinary humanity, depress the aspiring fancy. "Since our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning." Occasionally we must think of our fathers. No man can always dream of ever altering all which is. It is characteristic of Shelley, that at the end of his most rapturous and sanguine lyrics there intrudes the cold consciousness of this world. So with his Grecian dreams:—

"A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls its fountains
Against the morning-star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

"A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies:
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore."

But he ends:—

"O, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past—
Oh, might it die or rest at last!"[1]

In many of his poems the failing of the feeling is as beautiful as its short moment of hope and buoyancy.

The excellence of Shelley does not, however, extend equally over the whole domain of lyrical poetry. That species of art may be divided—not perhaps with the accuracy of science, but with enough for the rough purposes of popular criticism—into the human and the abstract. The sphere of the former is of course the actual life, passions, and actions of real men,—such

[1] "Hellas."

are the war-songs of rude nations especially; in that early age there is no subject for art but natural life and primitive passion. At a later time, when from the deposit of the *débris* of a hundred philosophies, a large number of half-personified abstractions are part of the familiar thoughts and language of all mankind, there are new objects to excite the feelings,—we might even say there are new feelings to be excited; the rough substance of original passion is sublimated and attenuated till we hardly recognise its identity. Ordinarily and in most minds the emotion loses in this process its intensity or much of it; but this is not universal. In some peculiar minds it is possible to find an almost dizzy intensity of excitement called forth by some fancied abstraction, remote altogether from the eyes and senses of men. The love-lyric in its simplest form is probably the most intense expression of primitive passion; yet not in those lyrics where such intensity is the greatest—in those of Burns, for example—is the passion so dizzy, bewildering, and bewildered, as in the "Epipsychidion" of Shelley, the passion of which never came into the real world at all, was only a fiction founded on fact, and was wholly—and even Shelley felt it—inconsistent with the inevitable conditions of ordinary existence. In this point of view, and especially also taking account of his peculiar religious opinions, it is remarkable that Shelley should have taken extreme delight in the Bible as a composition. He is the least biblical of poets. The whole, inevitable, essential conditions of real life—the whole of its plain, natural joys and sorrows—are described in the Jewish literature as they are described nowhere else. Very often they are assumed rather than delineated; and the brief assumption is more effective than the most elaborate description. There is none of the delicate sentiment and enhancing sympathy which a modern writer would think necessary; the inexorable facts are dwelt on with a stern humanity, which recognises human feeling though intent on something above it. Of all modern poets, Wordsworth shares the most in this peculiarity; perhaps he is the only recent one who has it at all. He knew the hills beneath whose shade "the generations are prepared":—

> "Much did he see of men,
> Their passions and their feelings: chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> That mid the simple form of rural life
> Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language".[1]

Shelley has nothing of this. The essential feelings he hoped to change; the eternal facts he struggled to remove. Nothing in human life to him was inevitable or fixed; he fancied he could alter it all. His sphere is the "unconditioned"; he floats away into an imaginary Elysium or an expected Utopia; beautiful and excellent, of course, but having nothing in common with the absolute laws of the present world. Even in the description of mere nature the difference may be noted. Wordsworth describes the earth as we know it, with all its peculiarities; where there are moors and hills, where the lichen grows, where the slate-rock juts out. Shelley describes the universe. He rushes away among the stars; this earth is an assortment of imagery, he uses it to deck some unknown planet. He scorns "the smallest light that twinkles in the heavens". His theme is the vast, the infinite, the immeasurable. He is not of our home, nor homely; he describes not our world, but that which is common to all worlds—the Platonic idea of a world. Where it can, his genius soars from the concrete and real into the unknown, the indefinite, and the void.

Shelley's success in the abstract lyric would prepare us for expecting that he would fail in attempts at eloquence. The mind which bursts forward of itself into the inane, is not likely to be eminent in the composed adjustments of measured persuasion. A voluntary self-control is necessary to the orator: even when he declaims, he must not only let himself go; a keen will must be ready, a wakeful attention at hand, to see that he does not say a word by which his audience will not be touched. The eloquence of "Queen Mab" is of that unpersuasive kind which is admired in the earliest youth, when things and life are unknown, when all that is intelligible is the sound of words.

[1] "Excursion," book i.

Lord Macaulay, in a passage to which we have referred already, speaks of Shelley as having, more than any other poet, many of the qualities of the great old masters; two of these he has especially. In the first place, his imagination is classical rather than romantic,—we should, perhaps, apologise for using words which have been used so often, but which hardly convey even now a clear and distinct meaning; yet they seem the best for conveying a distinction of this sort. When we attempt to distinguish the imagination from the fancy, we find that they are often related as a beginning to an ending. On a sudden we do not know how a new image, form, idea, occurs to our minds; sometimes it is borne in upon us with a flash, sometimes we seem unawares to stumble upon it, and find it as if it had long been there: in either case the involuntary, unanticipated appearance of this new thought or image is a primitive fact which we cannot analyse or account for. We say it originated in our imagination or creative faculty: but this is a mere expression of the completeness of our ignorance; we could only define the imagination as the faculty which produces such effects; we know nothing of it or its constitution. Again, on this original idea a large number of accessory and auxiliary ideas seem to grow or accumulate insensibly, casually, and without our intentional effort; the bare primitive form attracts a clothing of delicate materials—an adornment not altering its essences, but enhancing its effect. This we call the work of the fancy. An exquisite delicacy in appropriating fitting accessories is as much the characteristic excellence of a fanciful mind, as the possession of large, simple, bold ideas is of an imaginative one. The last is immediate; the first comes minute by minute. The distinction is like what one fancies between sculpture and painting. If we look at a delicate statue—a Venus or Juno—it does not suggest any slow elaborate process by which its expression was chiselled and its limbs refined; it seems a simple fact; we look, and require no account of it; it exists. The greatest painting suggests, not only a creative act, but a decorative process: day by day there was something new; we could watch the tints laid on, the dresses tinged, the perspective growing and grow-

ing. There is something statuesque about the imagination; there is the gradual complexity of painting in the most exquisite productions of the fancy. When we speak of this distinction, we seem almost to be speaking of the distinction between ancient and modern literature. The characteristic of the classical literature is the simplicity with which the imagination appears in it; that of modern literature is the profusion with which the most various adornments of the accessory fancy are thrown and lavished upon it. Perhaps nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the modern treatment of antique subjects. One of the most essentially modern of recent poets—Keats—has an "Ode to a Grecian Urn"; it begins:—

> "Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
> Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
> Sylvan historian! who canst thus express
> A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
> What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
> Of deities or mortals, or of both,
> In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
> What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

No ancient poet would have dreamed of writing thus. There would have been no indistinct shadowy warmth, no breath of surrounding beauty; his delineation would have been cold, distinct, chiselled like the urn itself. The use which such a poet as Keats makes of ancient mythology is exactly similar. He owes his fame to the inexplicable art with which he has breathed a soft tint over the marble forms of gods and goddesses, enhancing their beauty without impairing their chasteness. The naked kind of imagination is not peculiar to a mythological age. The growth of civilisation, at least in Greece, rather increased than diminished the imaginative bareness of the poetical art. It seems to attain its height in Sophocles. If we examine any of his greater passages, a principal beauty is their reserved simplicity. A modern reader almost necessarily uses them as materials for fancy: we are too used to little circumstance to be able to do

without it. Take the passage in which Œdipus contrasts the conduct of his sons with that of his daughters :—

> *ὦ πάντ' ἐκείνῳ τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις*
> *φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς.*
> *ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας*
> *θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες, αἱ δὲ σύννομοι*
> *τἄξω βίου τροφεῖα πορσύνουσ' ἀεί.*
> *σφῷν δ', ὦ τέκν', οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε,*
> *κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι,*
> *σφὼ δ' ἀντ' ἐκείνων τἀμὰ δυστήνου κακὰ*
> *ὑπερπονεῖτον. ἡ μέν ἐξ ὅτου νέας*
> *τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,*
> *ἀεὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη*
> *γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν*
> *ὕλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἀλωμένη,*
> *πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροις ἡλίου τε καύμασι*
> *μοχθοῦσα τλήμων, δεύτερ' ἡγεῖται τὰ τῆς*
> *οἴκοι διαίτης, εἰ πατὴρ τροφὴν ἔχοι.*[1]

What a contrast to the ravings of Lear! What a world of detail Shakespeare would have put into the passage! What talk of "sulphurous and thought-executing fires," "simulars of virtue," "pent-up guilts," and "the thick rotundity of the world"! Decorum is the principal thing in Sophocles. The conception of Œdipus is not—

> "Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,
> With harlocks, hemlock, nettle, and cuckoo-flowers".[2]

[1] "Œdipus at Colonos," lines 337-352 :—

> "Oh, they! in habits and in soul at once
> Shaped to the ways of Egypt,—where the men
> Sit by the fireside weaving, and their wives
> Toil in the field to furnish bread for both.
> So they whose duty was to suffer thus
> For you, my daughters, keep like girls at home,
> While in their stead you bear a wretch's woes.
> She here, since childhood's ways she left behind
> And gained a woman's vigour, ever near,
> Ill-fated, guides the old man's wandering feet,
> Famished and barefoot often, straying still
> Day after day the savage forest through,
> Scorched by the sun and drenched by many a storm,
> In patient toil her very household's wants
> Neglected so her father may be fed."
>
> (Forrest Morgan.)

[2] "King Lear," iii. 2.

There are no "idle weeds" [1] among the "sustaining corn".[2] The conception of Lear is that of an old gnarled oak, gaunt and quivering in the stormy sky, with old leaves and withered branches tossing in the air, and all the complex growth of a hundred years creaking and nodding to its fall. That of Œdipus is the peak of Teneriffe, as we fancied it in our childhood, by itself and snowy, above among the stormy clouds, heedless of the angry winds and the desolate waves, —single, ascending, and alone. Or, to change the metaphor to one derived from an art where the same qualities of mind have produced kindred effects, ancient poetry is like a Grecian temple, with pure form and rising columns,—created, one fancies, by a single effort of an originative nature: modern literature seems to have sprung from the involved brain of a Gothic architect, and resembles a huge cathedral—the work of the perpetual industry of centuries—complicated and infinite in details; but by their choice and elaboration producing an effect of unity which is not inferior to that of the other, and is heightened by the multiplicity through which it is conveyed. And it is this warmth of circumstance—this profusion of interesting detail—which has caused the name "romantic" to be perseveringly applied to modern literature.

We need only to open Shelley, to show how essentially classical in his highest efforts his art is. Indeed, although nothing can be farther removed from the staple topics of the classical writers than the abstract lyric, yet their treatment is nearly essential to it. We have said, its sphere is in what the Germans call the unconditioned—in the unknown, immeasurable, and untrodden. It follows from this that we cannot know much about it. We cannot know detail in tracts we have never visited; the infinite has no form; the immeasurable no outline: that which is common to all worlds is simple. There is therefore no scope for the accessory fancy. With a single soaring effort imagination may reach her end; if she fail, no fancy can help her; if she succeed, there will be no petty accumulations of insensible circumstance in a region far above all things. Shelley's excellence in the abstract lyric

[1] "King Lear," iv. 4. [2] *Ibid.*

is almost another phrase for the simplicity of his impulsive imagination.—He shows it on other subjects also. We have spoken of his bare treatment of the ancient mythology. It is the same with his treatment of nature. In the description of the celestial regions quoted before—one of the most characteristic passages in his writings—the details are few, the air thin, the lights distinct. We are conscious of an essential difference if we compare the "Ode to the Nightingale," in Keats, for instance—such verses as—

"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs:
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild,
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves,
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

"Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath:
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod":

—with the conclusion of the ode "To a Skylark"—

"Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

"Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

"Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.'

We can hear that the poetry of Keats is a rich, composite, voluptuous harmony; that of Shelley a clear single ring of penetrating melody.

Of course, however, this criticism requires limitation. There is an obvious sense in which Shelley is a fanciful, as contra-distinguished from an imaginative poet. These words, being invented for the popular expression of differences which can be remarked without narrow inspection, are apt to mislead us when we apply them to the exact results of a near and critical analysis. Besides the use of the word "fancy" to denote the power which adorns and amplifies the product of the primitive imagination, we also employ it to denote the weaker exercise of the faculty which itself creates those elementary products. We use the word "imaginative" only for strong, vast, imposing, interesting conceptions: we use the word "fanciful" when we have to speak of smaller and weaker creations, which amaze us less at the moment and affect us more slightly afterwards. Of course, metaphysically speaking, it is not likely that there will be found to be any distinction; the faculty which creates the most attractive ideas is doubtless the same as that which creates the less attractive. Common language marks the distinction, because common people are impressed by the contrast between what affects them much and what affects them little; but it is no evidence of the entire difference of the latent agencies. Speech, as usual, refers to sensations, and not to occult causes. Of fancies of this sort, Shelley is full: whole poems—as the "Witch of Atlas"—are composed of nothing else. Living a good deal in, and writing a great deal about, the abstract world, it was inevitable that he should often deal in fine subtleties, affecting very little the concrete hearts of real men. Many pages of his are, in consequence, nearly unintelligible, even to good critics of common poetry. The air is too rarefied for hardy and healthy lungs: these like, as Lord

Bacon expressed it, "to work upon stuff". From his habitual choice of slight and airy subjects, Shelley may be called a fanciful, as opposed to an imaginative, poet; from his bare delineations of great objects, his keen expression of distinct impulses, he should be termed an imaginative rather than a fanciful one.

Some of this odd combination of qualities Shelley doubtless owed to the structure of his senses. By one of those singular results which constantly meet us in metaphysical inquiry, the imagination and fancy are singularly influenced by the bodily sensibility. One might have fancied that the faculty by which the soul soars into the infinite, and sees what it cannot see with the eye of the body, would have been peculiarly independent of that body. But the reverse is the case. Vividness of sensation seems required to awaken, delicacy to define, copiousness to enrich, the visionary faculty. A large experience proves that a being who is blind to this world will be blind to the other; that a coarse expectation of what is not seen will follow from a coarse perception of what is seen. Shelley's sensibility was vivid but peculiar. Hazlitt used to say, "he had seen him; and did not like his looks". He had the thin keen excitement of the fanatic student; not the broad, natural energy which Hazlitt expected from a poet. The diffused life of genial enjoyment which was common to Scott and to Shakespeare, was quite out of his way. Like Mr. Emerson, he would have wondered they could be content with a "mean and jocular life". In consequence, there is no varied imagery from human life in his poetry. He was an abstract student, anxious about deep philosophy; and he had not that settled, contemplative, allotted acquaintance with external nature which is so curious in Milton, the greatest of studious poets. The exact opposite, however, to Shelley, in the nature of his sensibility, is Keats. That great poet used to pepper his tongue, "to enjoy in all its grandeur the cool flavour of delicious claret". When you know it, you seem to read it in his poetry. There is the same luxurious sentiment; the same poise on fine sensation. Shelley was the reverse of this; he was a water-drinker; his verse runs quick and chill, like a pure crystal stream. The sensibility of Keats was attracted too by the spectacle of the universe; he

could not keep his eyes from seeing, or his ears from hearing, the glories of it. All the beautiful objects of nature reappear by name in his poetry. On the other hand, the abstract idea of beauty is for ever celebrated in Shelley; it haunted his soul. But it was independent of special things; it was the general surface of beauty which lies upon all things. It was the smile of the universe and the expression of the world; it was not the vision of a land of corn and wine. The nerves of Shelley quivered at the idea of loveliness; but no coarse sensation obtruded particular objects upon him. He was left to himself with books and reflection.

So far, indeed, from Shelley having a peculiar tendency to dwell on and prolong the sensation of pleasure, he has a perverse tendency to draw out into lingering keenness the torture of agony. Of his common recurrence to the dizzy pain of mania we have formerly spoken; but this is not the only pain. The nightshade is commoner in his poems than the daisy. The nerve is ever laid bare; as often as it touches the open air of the real world, it quivers with subtle pain. The high intellectual impulses which animated him are too incorporeal for human nature; they begin in buoyant joy, they end in eager suffering.

In style, said Mr. Wordsworth—in workmanship, we think his expression was—Shelley is one of the best of us. This too, we think, was the second of the peculiarities to which Lord Macaulay referred when he said that Shelley had, more than any recent poet, some of the qualities of the great old masters. The peculiarity of his style is its intellectuality; and this strikes us the more from its contrast with his impulsiveness. He had something of this in life. Hurried away by sudden desires, as he was in his choice of ends, we are struck with a certain comparative measure and adjustment in his choice of means. So in his writings; over the most intense excitement, the grandest objects, the keenest agony, the most buoyant joy, he throws an air of subtle mind. His language is minutely and acutely searching; at the dizziest height of meaning the keenness of the words is greatest. As in mania, so in his descriptions of it, the acuteness of the mind

seems to survive the mind itself. It was from Plato and Sophocles, doubtless, that he gained the last perfection in preserving the accuracy of the intellect when treating of the objects of the imagination; but in its essence it was a peculiarity of his own nature. As it was the instinct of Byron to give in glaring words the gross phenomena of evident objects, so it was that of Shelley to refine the most inscrutable with the curious nicety of an attenuating metaphysician. In the wildest of ecstasies his self-anatomising intellect is equal to itself.

There is much more which might be said, and which ought to be said, of Shelley; but our limits are reached. We have not attempted a complete criticism; we have only aimed at showing how some of the peculiarities of his works and life may be traced to the peculiarity of his nature.

THE CRÉDIT MOBILIER AND BANKING COMPANIES IN FRANCE.[1]

(1857.)

THE crop of currency-pamphlets is beginning. We again read the old titles, "How shall we get through the Winter?" by a Merchant; "Too many Bank-notes," by Bullion; "*Ohe jam satis*," by Anti-Peel; "Faith in Paper," by a Warwickshire Magistrate; "Infallible Interchange," by Genius; "Sufficient Accommodation," by a Manchester Man—familiar to us ten years ago, likely perhaps to be familiar to us ten years hence. These pamphlets are as sure signs of scarce money as many thistles of a poor soil. When the currency is plentiful, people know what it is; when it is rare, they try to make out what it is, in order that they may obtain it. We have, however, no such aim; perhaps, indeed, the recent signs of diminishing scarcity may preclude such literature from multiplying. At any rate, though connected with money, our object is much more humble. We have no certain specific for pecuniary evils: no means of returning to any one the money he has spent. We do not even profess to be able to explain all the phenomena of the recent state of the money-market. We only mean to set forth a few facts as to a neighbouring country, whose pecuniary failures have, it is certain, a close connection with our own.

Even this, in ordinary cases, would be no very easy task.

[1] *Report presented by the Board of Administration of the General Association of Crédit Mobilier, at the ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders on the 23rd of April*, 1856. Translated from the French, and published as an advertisement in the *Times* of 21st May, 1856.

"Les Institutions de Crédit en France." *Par* M. Eugène Forcade. *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15 *Mars*, 1 *Avril*, 15 *Mai*, 1 *Juin*, 1856.

The political institutions of a country are a difficult subject for a foreigner: its daily commercial habits are still more so. We are fortunate, however, in having this time a very accomplished guide.

M. Eugène Forcade, in a series of essays (published in the *Revue des deux Mondes*) which we have placed at the head of our article, has thrown so much light on the recent history of the banking companies of France, that there is less risk in writing about them than might be fancied.

A person trained in the current political economy would *a priori* think that governments, despotic or free, had little to do with the trade of banking. The maxims of free-trade forbid them to engage in that trade as much or more than in any other; they cannot learn it; they have no means of watching transactions, estimating traders, scrutinising bills. Since they cannot know the business themselves, it is desirable they should interfere as little as possible with those who may know it. As usual, their true office is limited to enforcing the moralities of commerce, to ensuring the performance of engagements, to punishing frauds or gross negligence in the keeping of other people's property. So it would seem at first sight. There is something, however, a little interesting in large hoards of *money*. In a rude age a government is apt to appropriate them; even in a civilised age it is sometimes suspected of doing so; fifty years ago, there was a run on the Bank of France, from a report that the first Napoleon had taken all its reserve to Germany. But in general civilisation is decorous; it is skilled in "indirections"; it has a hundred ways of accomplishing its wishes; it is only after long study that you perceive through their seeming innocence any resemblance to the coarse actions of barbarous societies. On attentive observation, however, it will be found that few governments like to leave quite alone the money of their subjects. They rarely, indeed, keep it themselves; but they very commonly grant a monopoly in keeping it, or a monopoly of the most profitable way of using it when kept, or a monopoly of the right of associating in order to keep it, to some persons who promise "financial help". Mr. Macaulay has explained to us how political in its origin

was the Bank of England. A control over its subjects' money in some form almost all governments have been anxious to obtain.

As society goes on, a new temptation on this side seems to beset a government. In early society, regular industry is mostly carried on with people's own money; there is no great facility in borrowing much; no one has much to spare: those who have are anxious or usurious in lending it. As civilisation progresses, this alters. Large sums of money, by the agency of credit, accumulate in few hands. The holders of these have necessarily great power over the national industry. By the amount they choose to lend, they settle, for the moment, whether that industry shall be much or little; by the selection of the persons to whom they lend, they can stimulate one trade or another—one department of industry or another. Few governments have liked to leave this great power uncontrolled; they have striven by laws to keep it in check, by monopolies to keep it in hands which they can trust, likely to use it as they wish. Some power over it they have commonly thus succeeded in retaining.

If there be any truth in these remarks in general, it is perhaps in France, at the present moment, that we should expect the realisation of them. We repeat, till we are tired of repeating, that the government does everything in France; that police regulation there extends through human life; that even small undertakings are not protected by their minuteness from *surveillance;* that, in important undertakings, the State has the habit both of taking the initiative and keeping the check, —at once of giving the impulse and of watching that it does not go too far. This is not a feature of the present despotic government only. M. de Tocqueville has shown that a network of administration similar to the present existed before the first revolution. It existed equally under the Legitimist monarchy, the Constitutional monarchy, and the Republic; and its activity was pretty much the same under them all. No one can expect that a power so important, so convenient, so tempting as that of *money* would be left without government supervision; on the contrary, we should expect the

State to take a first place, to assume what is called the "leadership of industry" as a matter of course and at once.

The character and antecedents of the present ruler of France[1] do not diminish this expectation: on the contrary, they would increase it. He has been called a free-trader; it would be truer to call him a *free-spender*. No one can go to Paris, or, we believe, to any of the largest towns in France, without seeing great signs of the vast industrial works he has undertaken; of new streets and new public edifices; of an immense expenditure in employing labour. Although he appears, perhaps, to understand the maxims of Adam Smith, as far as they have reference to foreign tariffs, better than any former French Government, he has not shown any leaning towards them in matters of internal traffic. On the contrary, a natural taste for large expenditure seems to indispose him to admit the idea that the daily petty savings of a country are the narrow limit of its public efforts. Socialistic notions, too, from a very early period have had an influence—how great an influence he is too reserved to give us data for saying—upon his mind. He would evidently escape from the *régime* of competition if he could. His very position, according to the view which he so often inculcates of it, as the omnipotent chief of a democracy of which he is the representative, of a people which has exhausted its mission in appointing him, would incline him to take a view rather similar of matters commercial, —to approve rather of a single association which should embody than of competitive units which should constitute and compose the national industry. In a hundred ways the close narrowness of an anxious despotism shrinks from the free energetic play of internal commercial freedom. Still more important, in this point of view, is the composition of his court. Obvious circumstances separated him from the literary and oratorical statesmen of the monarchy: he wished to be served by those who were essentially and peculiarly men of business; they would have been out of place in a dumb administrative government. The Legitimist families, even if they had been trained in habits of action, have not commonly given their

[1] Napoleon III.

adhesion to a dynasty claiming under the people. The Emperor was almost compelled to choose his most conspicuous associates from the ambitious wealth of the country,—from commercial men, who wish to make money in order to be able to spend money,—whose aim it is to obtain a high social, still better, a court life, from the sums and labours of trade. A spirit of speculation has ever characterised such men. A haste to be rich is part of their essence; and such as are thus in haste, even if innocent, will never be cautious. In France, too, the spirit of Bourse speculation had deeply penetrated the political classes: the name of De Morny explains what we mean. No kind of persons could be imagined to whom the control and management of large sums of money would be more agreeable, or in whose hands it would be more dangerous.

These circumstances account for the inclination of the French Government to obtain the control of its subjects' money. A part of their law supplies the means. By the Code, the right to form a public company with limited liability (oddly called *société anonyme*, in contrast to private partnerships with individual names) can only be obtained from a government board which is absolute in practice as well as in theory—which can refuse applications without reason shown, and grant applications without giving an explanation. It is clearly therefore within the competence of a government to give certain of its friends, some of those with whom it has influence, some persons from whom it thinks it can obtain advantages, a real and strictly legal monopoly of a privilege of which able traders will make skilful use, and thereby probably a practical monoply of certain branches of trade. The circumstances are different from what an English trader would suppose. The French law of commercial association does not allow of companies with transferable shares, but with unlimited liability, of which we have so many. Limited liability is—oddly enough to our notions—made essential to a company, to the division of the capital into shares, and to their transferability at the pleasure of the holder; and in practice, accordingly, is an essential condition of great partnerships. It is true, the *société anonyme* is not the only form in which this limitation

of liability can be obtained; partnerships *en commandite* have likewise the privilege of transferable shares; but the division of the partners into two classes—one of which is unlimitedly and the other only limitedly responsible—however suitable in small undertakings where all the partners know one another, is practically difficult to manage on a large scale, where the interests of the two classes may seem to be in conflict, and where the unworking partners may not, when it comes to the point, quite like to give up the absolute control over the entire management, though its exclusive possession is one of the conditions upon which the working partners have agreed to be solely subject to an unlimited responsibility. There is little chance of a large *société en commandite* arising to compete with a *société anonyme* specially favoured by the State. Even if nothing else, the insensible influence of a foreign government forbids. Practically the French Emperor has the privilege of conferring on his friends a monopoly of large and limited commercial association.

The *Association Générale de Crédit Mobilier* would be the very embodiment of these remarks, if we could believe either the boasts of its friends, or the hints of its enemies. It is a *société anonyme*. It has a special charter from the government, which is little likely to give it a rival in its chosen sphere. Its conductors have relations, no one knows how intimate, with the courtier wealth and stock-speculating statesmen that surround the Emperor. Its object has been described as embodying the genius of commercial enterprise, "the spirit of the initiative". It boasts itself that it affords the greatest aid to the government in national loans, and considers it a part of the "spirit in which a great establishment should be conducted"—a trait of its "liberal devotedness"—to subscribe to loans without a profit. The patronage of the best national enterprises, it alleges, is its work. Railways, canals, maritime, all the great enterprises which are to immortalise the "Emperor of Industry," it is eager to aid. Nor is it content with a commonplace way of doing so. In the spirit of industrial socialism, it regrets the isolation of these undertakings. It wishes to replace them by a single company, which should be

the proprietor of all of them; at least of as many as it is able, and of all of them if it could. This design is no imputation of its enemies. The substitution of the stock of a single company for the shares and bonds of different undertakings is a point particularly dwelt on by its official expositor, M. Isaac Péreire.[1] It is with this view that it receives, we are informed, deposits of the money of individuals. "Credit" is the instrument with which it is to work. As the public appreciate its singular devotedness, it will gain strength. Differing from the maxim of Adam Smith, "that a trader who professes to be doing good to the public rarely does good to himself," the *société générale* will combine national usefulness with private solidity. At present, its greatest aims are in abeyance. Time is necessary to gain a position. It can only now, in a slight degree, and for a short time, aid in commercial undertakings. The limitation of its means, the number of claims on it, compel its conductors, not only to buy shares, but to sell them. The time is not yet come for a single beneficent association of industry.

On the other side we hear very different opinions. All over Europe there has been an impression that the association has been established for sinister purposes; that its disinterestedness is a pretence; that it promotes, and is meant to promote, the worst stock-exchange speculation; that even if it aided in action, the vastness of the schemes it patronises, and their number, might strain the national capital. But, in general, it is alleged that it is not intended for actual enterprise; that it does not really care for making railways or aiding canals; that its scene is the share-market. Some of these thoughts have found a very adequate expression in France itself. Restricted as the expression of opinion is in Paris, it is proportionably ingenious in finding safe vents. By tradition an advocate has a licence. Keenly watchful as a government may be over the conscientious utterance of in-

[1] The preamble of the statute states that the society has the object "*de favoriser le développement de l'industrie des travaux publics, et d'opérer par voie de consolidation en un fonds commun la conversion des titres particuliers d'entreprises diverses*".

dividual conviction, it has generally given a right of speech to those who do not pretend to be convinced. Those may be allowed to say what they mean who are known not to mean what they say. In Paris, the permission has been taken advantage of. A certain M. Goupo was found to bring an action against the Crédit Mobilier for issuing fictitious statements to raise the value of their shares. M. Goupo's commercial character was bad, and he could not establish his action; but it afforded M. Berryer an opportunity of giving a sufficiently keen criticism of the government company. "I do not know," said the great orator, "if, since 1828, M. Goupo has frequented the Bourse; but suppose he has, who is it that reproaches him with it? The Société de Crédit Mobilier, that is to say, the greatest gambling-house which the world has ever seen. We must not be misled by words; there are magnificent ones, I know—the protection of industry, the enfranchisement of the national credit, the development of private credit, the consolidation of all commercial stocks: a dream. All that is the surface; they have given to gambling a new name; they call it in their reports the Industry of Credit. The Industry of Credit; what is that? Their twenty-eight millions of profit; how have they been produced? They are not due to the prosperity of the enterprises in which the Crédit Mobilier has taken a share, and to whose aid it has brought its great influence. No; they are due to realisations which represent the difference between the price at which they sell and the price at which they buy. It is gambling which has produced them." Nor did the honesty of the administrators escape. "You are then, you say, an institution of public utility; you have limited liability, and you play; you are irresponsible, and you gamble; you are a bank of play which sees the cards," etc., etc. Such speeches are not now common in Paris.

If we turn from the eloquence of its enemies and the boasts of its friends to the actual facts of the Crédit Mobilier, the first surprise of an Englishman will be at the smallness of its means. Accustomed himself to very large companies, which yet neither wish, nor aim, nor are thought to have a tithe of the influence for good or for evil ascribed to the Association

Générale, he naturally expects that the latter is a greater combination than any with which he is familiar. He will be disappointed. The capital of the Crédit Mobilier is not so great as that of the Bristol and Exeter Railway, not one-fifth of the capital of the Great Western, about one-tenth of that of the London and North Western. The table of its liabilities shows how narrow are its means. We may turn it into English money, as the smallness of the French coin of account gives a magnificence to what is numbered in it :—

Capital	£2,400,000
Deposits, current accounts .	4,127,172
Bills payable and sundries .	34,576
Reserve fund . . .	67,844
Total amount of profit realised during the year 1855, after carrying a sufficient sum to the reserve fund . .	1,073,116
	£7,702,708

To an English trader, or an English economist, it appears idle to attempt to revolutionise industry with only seven millions or so of money. The London and Westminster Bank, a most useful institution, but strictly within the limits of pure prose, on which no one writes any eloquence, has as much. There is nothing in any other part of its financial statement which makes such an event more likely. The Crédit Mobilier is an ordinary chartered company, with limited liability; with £20 shares. The amount of the deposits it can receive is limited to twice its capital. It is a bank with special design and limited means. It is true, that according to its original charter it was to be allowed to issue debentures to the amount of ten times its capital; and in the theory of the institution these were to be the great instruments of its operation; they were to be issued in exchange for the shares, or bonds, of different companies by way of purchase money: if a man had ten shares in the Strasburg Railway, he was to sell them to the Crédit Mobilier, and receive a debenture of the latter by way of payment. Gradually, and in an indefinite perspective,

this was to be extended, till the Crédit Mobilier had bought up the whole of the Strasburg Railway, and all similar works. Of course, however, a perpetual repetition of this operation would require an indefinite issue of bonds; and on the first attempt to issue them, there was, perhaps, a hesitation on the part of the public, much outcry on the part of the opponents of the company; and finally, a paragraph in the *Moniteur* quashed the operation. There is as yet no reason either to hope or to fear that the Société Générale will succeed in buying up and incorporating with itself the shares of different undertakings.

The business of the company hitherto has been of a very simple, though profitable nature. As is shown by the above account, they have received four millions, and rather more, of depositors' money. This has been obtained by a slight variation from their original charter, by which it was only intended that they should act as bankers for public companies; they now receive the deposits of individuals also. The employment of their money has been mainly in share-speculating. Their account of assets, showing what they have done with their money, proves this; it is as follows:—

Rentes	£1,602,770	
Debentures	1,313,784	
Railway and other shares	2,377,264	
	£5,293,818	
Deducted for calls not made up to the 31st December, 1855	1,246,668	
		£4,047,150
Investments for fixed periods, in treasury bonds, continuations, advances on shares, debentures, etc.		3,373,016
Premises and furniture		43,288
Balance in hand, and dividends to be received on 31st December last		239,254
		£7,702,708

It is clear that the first item of £4,047,150 is entirely a purchase of public and private securities, stock, shares, or

debentures. It is difficult to say how much of the second item of £3,373,016 is a loan on deposit of such securities, or likewise a purchase of them. All ambiguity, however, is removed by a reference to the profit-and-loss account; from which it appears that the profit obtained, or reckoned on a valuation of present stock to be obtainable, from the sales of property purchased, is £962,224.[1] The income derived from it £120,816. The interest derivable from other sources, including "continuations," is only £110,571; from which it is quite clear that the loan operations of the society must be comparatively trifling, and that it is from the bargain and sale of shares and similar property that its profit of more than a

[1] The profit-and-loss account last published is as follows in English money, omitting shillings and pence :—

The total amount of rentes, shares, and debentures in hand, which on 31st December, 1854, was		£2,298,404
Has been augmented by purchases and subscriptions made during the year 1855		10,632,836
Total		£12,931,240
The amount of realisations having been	£8,680,097	
To which must be added the amount of securities remaining on hand	5,293,818	
		13,973,915
There results a profit of		£1,042,675
The profits arising from commissions and interest on advances amount to		57,099
The continuations on shares and rentes have produced		53,472
The interest derived from various sources of investment has amounted to		120,816
The proceeds of the reserve fund to		768
Total gross profit		£1,274,830
For general charges, expenses of administration, and first establishment	£23,838	
For interest on accounts current	41,703	
For gratuities, relief, and charitable donations	5,559	
		71,100
		£1,203,731

million or some 40 per cent. upon its capital has been derived. This explains the influence which is ascribed to it, and the almost terror with which it is mentioned. Seven millions and a half of money, though a trifle in works of real enterprise, insufficient to make a first-class railway, or any work which the nineteenth century would think great,—though not to English notions very vast for loans to commercial men, and for the legitimate operations of banking,—though ludicrously insufficient for "consolidating the stock of different undertakings," is nevertheless a very large sum to be employed in share-speculating. A movable sum of that amount in the hands of clever scheming and active men (and such, it is universally agreed, are the administrators of the Crédit Mobilier) must be capable of producing great effects. We will not, with M. Berryer, call the Crédit Mobilier the greatest gambling-house which the world has ever seen; but we must regard it as a formidable speculator, a stock-exchange "operator" of the first magnitude.

Such is the Crédit Mobilier, according to the facts and its published accounts; and though it is very different from what the magniloquent pretensions of its expositors would persuade us to believe, the objections to it are very considerable. In the first place, it cannot but promote a spirit of gambling

From this amount of profit we further deduct the following items:		
Extraordinary sinking fund on the land account, in order to bring back the amount to the purchase price	£23,612	
Reductions on the cost-price of securities not quoted on 'Change	36,838	
Lastly, presumed loss upon the purchases of corn	20,000	
		80,450
Balance of profit on 31st December, 1855 .		£1,123,281

With respect to the last deduction, M. Forcade thinks, apparently rightly, that the company had no power under their charter to speculate in corn.

speculation. In a country where the direct sanction of the government is the strongest of moving powers, that government sanctions the establishment of a huge company, with the special object of speculating. It gives to this company practically the monopoly of the considerable advantages of limited responsibility. That company speculates on a large scale. It buys and sells, as the accounts show, to the extent of nine or ten millions per annum. It is impossible that this should produce no effect on excitable people. The old speculators of the Bourse—many of them the rivals of the fortunate men who have obtained the favour of the government—are not likely to submit quietly. They speculate in rivalship and in opposition to the company; the effect is a still further disturbance of the Bourse market—more rises and falls—a new opportunity for further speculation. The French are the last people who can be trusted with such a temptation. Cautious—timidly cautious as they have ever been in legitimate commerce, remarkable for a tendency to a petty and pedlar traffic, as Mr. Burke said long ago they were—gambling proper, or mere traffic in chance risings and falls of price, has ever had a great attraction for them. A lottery is always a favourite topic. Some of the soundest companies try to combine something like it with the issue of their debentures, in order to make them more popular. Trafficking in the shares of companies with limited responsibility is exactly adapted for a people who are really timid, but are fond of the excitement of risk; it defines the amount of danger; it shows them all they hazard; it allows them the pleasure of venturing it, as well, we fancy, as most commonly the pain of losing it. At present, it is said, the mania has penetrated into a very humble class. A coal-heaver was seen, only a few days since, to come from the Bourse, in the attire of his trade, trying to read his share. To see a sort of government-company speculating; to see opposition rivals speculating; to see a great game going on, and have such sanction for playing it,—is too much for Frenchmen. They have played it.

The share speculations of the Crédit Mobilier are liable

to a further objection. Whatever people may do with their own money, they have no right to speculate with the money of other people. The Crédit Mobilier receives deposits on "account current"; doubtless the greater part repayable at short periods, if not on demand. They ought only to employ these in temporary investments—loans, discounts, short transactions, in a word—of which the end can be seen, and from which they can soon have their money returned if they want it. The special design is exactly the contrary. The Crédit Mobilier is avowedly intended to aid undertakings of which the duration is long and the returns slow—"*opérations à long terme*". It seems the most obvious common-sense that a company should be sure of having for a long time the moneys it proposes to invest in lengthy operations. If the Crédit Mobilier were to get into discredit, if it were to have to realise the four millions of securities it now holds, it could not be sure of realising them at a profit; as the time would probably be one of diffused discredit, it would, in all reasonable likelihood, realise them at a loss. No apparent or even realised profits for one or two years can make this a generally safe and wise scheme of operations. M. Forcade has remarked that the founders of the Crédit Mobilier recognised a very similar obligation. When speaking of the bonds which they were proposing to issue, they distinguished between those of short date, which were to correspond to mere temporary investments which run off and bring in funds to meet the bonds as soon as they become due, and bonds of long date, which were to correspond to investments comparatively permanent. It is obvious that deposits on "current account" correspond exactly with bonds at short date in this respect. Perhaps we should say, the same reasons apply to them with augmented force, for they constitute the most vital and essential part of the whole association; if ever it get into discredit as a bank of deposit, it cannot go on for a day. In his report for 1854, M. Péreire, the real head of the company, actually boasted that the fixed investments of the company had been restricted to their own capital; we should like to know how he makes

out that an equal caution has been observed in 1855. The Minister of Finance, who is said, probably with truth, to be officially (the *Moniteur*, we believe, says daily) informed of all the Crédit Mobilier does, should look into the matter at once. No government can afford to be blind to the responsibility of founding such a company, or accepting such a supervision.

The danger of such a company as the Crédit Mobilier does not stop at the threshold of the Bourse, nor with its own operations. What it calls the encouragement of industry is in some circumstances a dangerous thing. Industry may be encouraged too much. The limit of the proper new investments of a country in every year is, the saving on hand from the year or years just preceding. All old savings, as a rule, are invested; the only new fund is the new accumulation. This is all which a nation can spend in a new way without trenching on old ways. The experience of 1847 has enlightened us in England about this. We then found that we were endeavouring to lay out in railways more money than we had at call. We were obliged to withdraw funds from our old trades and investments to meet our new engagements; and the time accidentally coinciding with that of a deficient harvest, and finding many old and mismanaged houses living on a credit which they had nothing to justify, the result was a panic. The case is that of a landowner who "improves" himself out of his income; who spends all his available money in draining, and then has no cash to meet his weekly bills. France is now learning this lesson. Mainly devoted to Bourse speculation, as the Crédit Mobilier may be, it nevertheless requires something to speculate with. New shares are the best means. It is a great convenience to enterprising founders of companies to have a wealthy body like the Crédit Mobilier, almost always ready to take a considerable number of shares. The "spirit of the initiative" helps them over the first difficulty. It answers, or, at least, did answer, for a time the purpose of the Crédit Mobilier to take shares; for their support is well known, and the idea that they are "backing" the new enterprise raises the price. This is the old

policy of Mr. Hudson, and in excited markets it is a very effective one. The forty per cent. profit which figures in the last account is, we fear, partially caused by reckoning on a value of shares augmented by the notion that the Crédit Mobilier is aiding the undertaking, which may be apt to be followed by a corresponding depreciation when the company begins to sell, and the rumour gets abroad that the Crédit Mobilier, "the leader of industry," is withdrawing its support. However this may be, it is certain that a very large number of new undertakings are brought out in France, and that the commencement of these is avowedly promoted by the Crédit Mobilier. A well-informed correspondent of the *Economist*, writing, on the 12th July, before the straits of the autumn, and therefore without any temptation to find "facts" to account for the scarcity of money, wrote as follows: "The manner in which French capitalists and speculators are extending their relations to foreign countries, is one of the most remarkable signs of the times, and affords an astonishing contrast to the extreme timidity which characterised them a few years ago, when it required English capital and enterprise to convince them that railways in France itself might be made profitable. At present they have got under their exclusive control railways in Switzerland, in Austria, in Italy, in Spain, in Holland, and in Belgium; they have established Crédit Mobiliers in Madrid and Turin, are about to do the same in Lisbon, and are trying to do the same at St. Petersburg and Constantinople; they are endeavouring to obtain concessions of railways in Russia; they have established a large bank at Darmstadt, and will not rest until they get one at Constantinople; they recently got up a Crédit Mobilier at Brussels; and though the government has not thought fit to authorise it for the present, they are sure of getting it sanctioned in time; they hold important concessions of mines and coal-pits in Spain, in the Rhenish provinces, and in Silesia; they hold a large, and in some cases a predominating, interest in numerous railways, iron-works, coal-pits, and banks in Belgium; they are about to establish lines of gigantic steamers to ply between different ports of France and Brazil, the United States, the West Indies,

etc.; they are taking the lead in the project for cutting through the isthmus at Suez; and they have a pretty considerable interest in the omnibuses of London. As regards foreign enterprise, at least in Europe, they have certainly within the last few years cast the English completely into the shade. Foreigners who now want railways made, and mines worked, and banks established, or money for any other enterprise whatever, do not go to London as they used to do—they come to Paris. And at this very moment France is under engagements to supply to foreign countries at least £40,000,000 sterling in the space of some half-dozen years. Now it may be quite true that this sudden fervour of the French for foreign undertakings is but one phase of the industrial, money-getting mania which now possesses them; and it is quite true, too, that many of the enterprises they take up are regarded less on their intrinsic merits than as an additional element in stock-jobbing operations on the Paris Bourse. But still it is a question whether Englishmen have not of late shown somewhat too much supineness in foreign commercial affairs generally; and whether, in particular, they have not fallen into the habit of regarding French railways, French Crédit Mobiliers, and French everything, as the only matters worthy of interest on the entire Continent." The domestic investments have not been trifling. M. Rouher, the Minister of Finance, has recently explained to us what the cost of French railways has been:—

From 1852 to 1854 (both exclusive) was	£27,915,112
In 1855	19,424,206
„ 1856	19,154,228
Total	£66,493,606

The whole previous expenditure of France on railways was very much about the same sum; so that during the reign of Louis Napoleon, France has expended on this sort of investment as much as she had before expended in all her previous history. This would be a great effort for a country not very renowned for commercial activity, even if it stood alone; but we must add to it all the expenditure on public works, edifices,

and useful undertakings in various parts of France, and in Paris especially, which mark the reign of the present Emperor. It is impossible that this vast outlay should not try the resources of any nation. The recent scarcity of money proves them to have done so. Even in that which the Crédit Mobilier considers its peculiar usefulness, it has probably been an unnecessary stimulant, administered just when there was occasion for a warning and a restraint.

It is to be remembered likewise, that these great undertakings are commenced either during, or just after, a long war. It is difficult to imagine that they should not strain the movable resources of a country which is not rich in proportion to her political importance; whose saving classes would be terrified at the idea of their money going abroad; where the system of banking is so imperfect as to leave much money in the keeping of the original accumulators, under the thatch of houses, or in corners of cottages, in hands and places where there is no chance of its becoming available.

So far, therefore, from considering his encouragement of industry as one of the great titles which will ennoble (for so his admirers teach) the reign of Louis Napoleon in the eyes of a distant posterity, we believe that the foundation of such an institution as the Crédit Mobilier with a particular view is utterly unsuitable to the proper aims of a government, and is likely to be very mischievous. Already, indeed, it seems to have produced great evils. Although the legitimate commerce of France is, according to the best-qualified judges, extremely healthy,—while its real merchants and shopkeepers are driving a steady business, neither wishing for unusual credit nor entering into unusual speculations,—the rate of interest has been higher than has been known for many years. The legitimate trader has been stinted. Some of the capital usually advanced to him has been withdrawn from the country, some sunk in railways at home; but the greatest demand has been on the Bourse to meet an extravagant and mischievous craving for accommodation from persons who have entered into speculations beyond their

means, and who are endeavouring to avoid the certain loss of immediate realisation by paying any rates for the necessary loans. The whole sound, saving, laborious industry of the country is crippled to meet the wants of some speculators, who wish to scheme and spend, but not to save or work. This would be dangerous in any country, but in the present state of France it is especially dangerous there. Nothing is more striking in M. de Tocqueville's new book than the cold and guarded melancholy with which he regards the increasing inclination of his countrymen for money-making pursuits. It is one of his objections to a combination of equality and absolutism, to a despot appointed by the democracy. "Men in such countries," he tells us, "being no longer connected together by any ties of caste, of class, of corporation, of family, are but too easily inclined to think of nothing but their private interests, ever too ready to consider themselves only, and to sink into the narrow precincts of self, in which all public virtue is extinguished. Despotism, instead of combating this tendency, renders it irresistible; for it deprives its subjects of every common passion, of every mutual want, of all necessity of combining together, of all occasions of acting together. It immures them in private life: they already tended to separation; despotism isolates them: they were already chilled in their mutual regard; despotism reduces them to ice. In such societies, in which nothing is stable, every man is incessantly stimulated by the fear of falling and by eagerness to rise; and as money, while it has become the principal mark by which men are classed and distinguished, has acquired an extraordinary mobility, passing without cessation from hand to hand, transforming the condition of persons, raising or lowering that of families, there is scarcely a man who is not compelled to make desperate and continual efforts to retain or acquire it. The desire to be rich at any cost, the love of business, the passion of lucre, the pursuit of comfort and of material pleasures, are therefore in such communities the prevalent passions. They are easily diffused through all classes, they penetrate even to those

classes which had hitherto been most free from them, and would soon enervate and degrade them all, if nothing checked their influence. But it is of the very essence of despotism to favour and extend that influence. These debilitating passions assist its work: they divert and engross the imaginations of men away from public affairs, and cause them to tremble at the bare idea of a revolution. Despotism alone can lend them the secrecy and the shade which put cupidity at its ease, and enable men to make dishonourable gains whilst they brave dishonour. Without despotic government such passions would be strong: with it they are sovereign."

If the commerce were of the healthy and legitimate sort which is based on regular industry, this criticism might need qualification. It might be thought to be the expression, if not of a disappointed man, yet of a disappointed literary class. But there is nothing to be alleged against it if the commerce be one of mere bargain and sale, if it lead to no healthy industry, if it foster the desire of gain without the labour which ennobles it. As times go, the making of money by work is perhaps the most innocent employment of man; but no passion is so dangerous as an avarice which is at the same time inactive and intense.

Such are the evil consequences which a government almost inevitably draws upon it by attempting to control or direct the natural industry of individuals. The aim at a monopoly, as we know, is a mistake. Great evils may and do arise under the *régime* of competition, but they are self-corrective. Certain persons attempt to make a profit in a mistaken way. The issue proves that they were wrong: they fail. Wiser men who never shared in the belief, timid men who wished some one else to try it first, are unaffected. The world profits, or might profit, from the experience. The operation of a single large company is very different. It runs its career alone; it does what no ordinary trader would attempt; neither its failure, nor success are guides to ordinary commerce. We need not touch what even Mr. Cobden now calls the tedium of a free-trade argument. The very evils of competition

instruct the competitors; the failure of a monopoly can only instruct the monopolist, and him it destroys.[1]

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[1] In 1856 there were strong antipathies against the Emperor Napoleon, and every act by him was misrepresented by his adversaries. The Crédit Mobilier was not, as then supposed, simply a machine for gambling on the Bourse authorised to Court favourites. It was the work of hardy pioneers, the Péreires and Michel Chevalier, I believe, who were far in advance of their age, like the Emperor himself, as he proved later in concluding the treaty of commerce with England. The Crédit Mobilier was a brilliant meteor, and gave such an impetus to the spirit of enterprise as had never before been witnessed. The number of companies launched by it fill nearly a page of McCourtoe's *History of Banks in France.* A great many still exist and have become great institutions, like the Paris Gas, Omnibus, and Cab Companies, the Transatlantic Steamship Company; railways in Russia, Spain, France, and elsewhere; the Belgian Vieille Montagne Zinc Works, the Ottoman Bank, etc. Unfortunately it undertook too much and eventually came to grief, and had to go into liquidation, sometime before the war of 1870, and the failure was followed by the prosecution of the old directors. (J. Longhurst, 1895.)

LORD BROUGHAM.[1]

(1857.)

IT was a bold, perhaps a rash idea, to collect the writings of Henry Brougham. They were written at such distant dates; their subjects are so various; they are often so wedged into the circumstances of an age—that they scarcely look natural in a series of volumes. Some men, doubtless, by a strong grasp of intellect, have compacted together subjects as various; the finger-marks of a few are on all human knowledge; others, by a rare illuminative power, have lit up as many with a light that seems peculiar to themselves. *Franciscus Baconus sic cogitavit* may well illustrate an *opera omnia*. But Lord Brougham has neither power; his restless genius has no claim to the still, illuminating imagination; his many-handed, apprehensive intelligence is scarcely able to fuse and concentrate. Variety is his taste, and versatility his power. His career has not been quiet. For many years rushing among the details of an age, he has written as he ran. There are not many undertakings bolder than to collect the works of such a life and such a man.

The edition itself seems a good one. The volumes are convenient in size, well printed, and fairly arranged. The various writings it contains have been revised, but not over-revised, by their author. It is not, however, of the collection that we wish to speak. We would endeavour, so far as a few hasty pages may serve, to delineate the career and character of the writer. The attempt is among the most difficult. He is still among us; we have not the materials,

[1] *Works of Henry Lord Brougham, F.R.S.*, Member of the National Institute of France and the Royal Academy of Naples. London: Griffin.

possibly not the impartiality, of posterity. Nor have we the familiar knowledge of contemporaries; the time when Lord Brougham exerted his greatest faculties is beyond the political memory of younger men. There are no sufficient books on the events of a quarter of a century ago, we have only traditions; and this must be our excuse if we fall, or seem to fall, into error and confusion.

The years immediately succeeding the great peace were years of sullenness and difficulty. The idea of the war had passed away; the thrill and excitement of the great struggle were no longer felt. We had maintained, with the greatest potentate of modern times, a successful contest for existence. We had our existence, but we had no more; our victory had been great, but it had no fruits. By the aid of pertinacity and capital, we had vanquished genius and valour; but no visible increase of European influence followed. Napoleon said that Wellington had made peace as if he had been defeated. We had delivered the continent; such was our natural idea: but the continent went its own way. There was nothing in its state to please the everyday Englishman. There were kings and emperors; "which was very well for foreigners, they had always been like that; but it was not many kings could pay ten per cent. income tax". Absolutism, as such, cannot be popular in a free country. The Holy Alliance, which made a religion of despotism, was scarcely to be reconciled with the British constitution. Altogether we had vanquished Napoleon, but we had no pleasure in what came after him. The cause which agitated our hearts was gone; there was no longer a noise of victories in the air; continental affairs were dead, despotic, dull; we scarcely liked to think that we had made them so; with weary dissatisfaction we turned to our own condition.

This was profoundly unsatisfactory. Trade was depressed; agriculture ruinous; the working class singularly disaffected. During the war, our manufacturing industry had grown most rapidly; there was a not unnatural expectation that, after a general peace, the rate of increase would be accelerated. The whole continent, it was considered, would be opened to us;

Milan and Berlin decrees no longer excluded us; Napoleon did not now interpose between "the nation of shopkeepers" and its customers; now he was at St. Helena, surely those customers would buy? It was half forgotten that they could not. The drain of capital for the war had been, at times, heavily felt in England; there had been years of poverty and discredit; still our industry had gone on, our workshops had not stopped. We had never known what it was to be the seat of war, as well as a power at war. We had never known our burdens enormously increased, just when our industry was utterly stopped; disarranged as trading credit sometimes was, it had not been destroyed. No conscription had drained us of our most efficient consumers. The continent, south and north, had, though not everywhere alike, suffered all these evils; its populations were poor, harassed, depressed. They could not buy our manufactures, for they had no money. The large preparations for a continental export lay on hand; our traders were angry and displeased. Nor was content to be found in the agricultural districts. During the war, the British farmer had inevitably a monopoly of this market; at the approach of peace, his natural antipathy to foreign corn influenced the legislator. The Home Secretary of the time had taken into consideration whether 76s. or 80s. was such a remunerating price as the agriculturist should obtain, and a corn law had passed accordingly. But no law could give the farmer famine prices, when there was scarcity here and plenty abroad. There were riots at the passing of the "Bread-tax," as it was; in 1813, the price of corn was 120s.; the rural mind was sullen in 1816, when it sunk to 57s. The protection given, though unpopular with the poor, did not satisfy the farmer.

The lower orders in the manufacturing districts were, of necessity, in great distress. The depression of trade produced its inevitable results of closed mills and scanty employment. Wages, when they could be obtained, were very low. The artisan population was then new to the vicissitudes of industry: how far they are, even now, instructed in the laws of trade, recent prosperity will hardly let us judge; but, at that time,

they had no doubt that it was the fault of the State, and if not of particular statesmen, then of the essential institutions, that they were in want. They believed the Government ought to regulate their remuneration, and make it sufficient. During some straitened years of the war the name of "Luddites" became known. They had principally shown their discontent by breaking certain machines, which they fancied deprived them of work. After the peace, the records of the time are full of "Spencean Philanthropists," "Hampden Clubs," and similar associations, all desiring a great reform—some of mere politics, others of the law of property and all social economy. Large meetings were everywhere held, something like those of the year 1839: a general insurrection, doubtless a wild dream of a few hot-brained dreamers, was fancied to have been really planned. The name "Radical" came to be associated with this discontent. The spirit which, in after years, clamoured distinctly for the five points of the Charter, made itself heard in mutterings and threatenings.

Nor were the capitalists, who had created the new wealth, socially more at ease. Many of them, as large employers of labour, had a taste for Toryism; the rule of the people to them meant the rule of their workpeople. Some of the wealthiest and most skilful became associated with the aristocracy, but it was vain with the majority to attempt it. Between them and the possessors of hereditary wealth there was fixed a great gulf; the contrast of habits, speech, manners, was too wide. The two might coincide in particular opinions; they might agree to support the same institutions; they might set forth, in a Conservative creed, the same form of sound words: but, though the abstract conclusions were identical, the mode of holding them—to borrow a subtlety of Father Newman's—was exceedingly different. The refined, discriminating, timorous immobility of the aristocracy was distinct from the coarse, dogmatic, keep-downishness of the manufacturer. Yet more marked was the contrast, when the opposite tendencies of temperament had produced, as they soon could not but do, a diversity of opinion. The case was not quite new in England. Mr. Burke spoke of the tendency of the first East Indians to

Jacobinism. They could not, he said, bear that their present importance should have no proportion to their recently acquired riches. No extravagant fortunes have, in this century, been made by Englishmen in India; but Lancashire has been a California. Families have been created there, whose names we all know, which we think of when we mention wealth; some of which are now, by lapse of time, passing into the hereditary caste of recognised opulence. This, however, has been a work of time; and, before it occurred, there was no such intermediate class between the new wealth and the old. "It takes," it is said that Sir Robert Peel observed, "three generations to make a gentleman." In the meantime, there was an inevitable misunderstanding; the new cloth was too coarse for the old. Besides this, many actual institutions offended the eyes of the middle class. The state of the law was opposed both to their prejudices and interests: that you could only recover your debts by spending more than the debt, was hard; and the injury was aggravated, the money was spent in "special pleading"—"in putting a plain thing so as to perplex and mislead a plain man". "Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery," as Sydney Smith expressed it, "sat heavy on mankind." The existence of slavery in our colonies, strongly supported by a strong aristocratic and parliamentary influence, offended the principles of middle-class Christianity, and the natural sentiments of simple men. The cruelty of the penal law—the punishing with death, sheep-stealing and shop-lifting—jarred the humanity of that second order of English society, which, from their habits of reading and non-reading, may be called, *par excellence*, the scriptural classes. The routine harshness of a not very wise executive did not mitigate the feeling. The *modus operandi* of Government appeared coarse and oppressive.

We seemed to pay, too, a good deal for what we did not like. At the close of the war, the ten per cent. income tax was of course heavily oppressive. The public expenditure was beyond argument lavish; and it was spent in pensions, sinecures (for "them idlers," in the speech of Lancashire), and a mass of sundries, that an economical man of business will

scarcely admit to be necessary, and that even now, after countless prunings, produce periodically "financial reform associations," "administrative leagues," and other combinations which amply testify the enmity of thrifty efficiency to large figures and muddling management. There had remained from the eighteenth century a tradition of corruption, an impression that direct pecuniary malversation pervaded the public offices; an idea true in the days of Rigby or Bubb Dodington, but which, like many other impressions, continued to exist many years after the facts in which it originated had passed away. Government, in the hands of such a man as Lord Liverpool, was very different from government in the hands of Sir Robert Walpole: respectability was exacted; of actual money-taking there was hardly any. Still, especially among inferior officials, there was something to shock modern purity. The size of jobs was large: if the Treasury of that time could be revived, it would be depressed at the littleness of whatever is perpetrated in modern administration. There were petty abuses too in the country—in municipalities—in charitable trusts—in all outlying public moneys, which seemed to the offended man of business, who saw them with his own eyes, evident instances confirming his notion of the malpractices of Downing Street. "There are only five little boys in the school of Richester; they may cost £200, and the income is £2000, and the trustees don't account for the balance; which is the way things are done in England: we keeps an aristocracy," etc. The whole of this feeling was concentrated into a detestation of rotten boroughs. The very name was enough: that Lord Dover, with two patent sinecures in the Exchequer and a good total for assisting in nothing at the Audit office, should return two members for one house, while Birmingham, where they made buttons,—"as good buttons as there are in the world, sir,"—returned no members at all, was an evident indication that reform was necessary. Mr. Canning was an eloquent man; but "even *he* could not say that a decaying stump was the *people*". Gatton and Old Sarum became unpopular. The source of power seemed absurd, and the use of power was tainted. Side by side with the incipient Chartism of the

northern operative, there was growing daily more distinct and clear the Manchester philosophy, which has since expressed itself in the Anti-Corn Law League, and which, for good and evil, is now an element so potent in our national life. Both creeds were forms of discontent. And the counterpoise was wanting. The English constitution has provided that there shall always be one estate raised above the storms of passion and controversy, which all parties may respect and honour. The king is to be loved. But this theory requires, for a real efficiency, that the throne be filled by such a person as can be loved. In those times it was otherwise. The nominal possessor of the crown was a very old man, whom an incurable malady had long sequestered from earthly things. The actual possessor of the royal authority was a voluptuary of overgrown person, now too old for healthy pleasure, and half sickened himself at the corrupt pursuits in which, nevertheless, he indulged perpetually. His domestic vices had become disgracefully public. Whatever might be the truth about Queen Caroline, no one could say she had been well treated. There was no royalty on which suffering workers, or an angry middle class, could repose: all through the realm there was a miscellaneous agitation, a vague and wandering discontent.

The official mind of the time was troubled. We have a record of its speculations in the life of Lord Sidmouth, who more than any one perhaps embodied it. He had been Speaker, and was much inclined to remedy the discontent of the middle classes by "naming them to the House". A more conscientious man perhaps has never filled a public position. If the forms of the House of Commons had been intuitively binding, no one could have obeyed them better: the "mace" was a "counsel of perfection" to him; all disorder hateful. In the Home Office it was the same. The Luddites were people who would not obey the Speaker. Constituted authority must be enforced. The claims of a suffering multitude were not so much neglected as unappreciated. A certain illiberality, as we should now speak, pervades the whole kind of thought. The most striking feature is an indisposition, which by long indulgence has become an inability, to comprehend another

person's view, to put oneself in another's mental place, to think what he thinks, to conceive what he inevitably is. Lord Sidmouth referred to the file. He found that Mr. Pitt had put down disaffection by severe measures. Accordingly, he suspended the Habeas Corpus Act, passed six Acts, commended a Peterloo massacre, not with conscious unfeelingness, but from an absorbed officiality, from a knowledge that this was what "the department" had done before, and an inference that this must be done again. As for the reforming ideas of the middle classes, red tape had never tied up such notions; perhaps it was the French Revolution over again: you could not tolerate *them*.

Between such a dominant mind as this, and such a subject mind as has been described, there was a daily friction. The situation afforded obvious advantages to enterprising men. Its peculiarity did not escape the shrewd eyes of John Lord Eldon. "If," said the Conservative Chancellor, "I were to begin life again, d——n my eyes, but I would begin as an agitator." Henry Brougham did so begin. During the war he had distinguished himself in the exposition of the grievances of the trading interest. Our Government had chosen a mode of carrying it on specially fitted to injure our commerce. "Napoleon had said that no vessel should touch a British port, and then enter a French one, or one under French control. The Orders in Council said that no vessel whatever should enter any such port without having first touched at some port of Great Britain."[1] The natural results were the annihilation of our trade with the continent and a quarrel with the United States. The merchants of the country were alarmed at both consequences. Perhaps until then men hardly knew how powerful our trading classes had become. Meetings were held in populous places; petitions in great numbers—an impressive and important thing in those times—were presented. Wherever foreign commerce existed, the discontent expressed itself in murmurs. The forms of the House of Commons were

[1] This and the following quotations are from the *Speeches of Lord Brougham and the Introductions to them*, published in 1838. The latter were written by himself.

far more favourable than they are now to action from without; and this is not unnatural, since there had been as yet but few actions from without, and it had not been necessary to have a guard against them. "The petitions, as has been said, were numerous; and on the presentation of each, there was a speech from the member presenting it, trying to bring on a debate, and suggesting topics which might irritate the ministry and convince the country." Mr. Brougham was always in his place. "Hardly an hour passed without detecting some false statement or illogical argument; hardly a night passed without gaining some convert to the cause of truth." The result was decisive. "Although opposed by the whole weight of the Government both in public and out of doors; although at first vigorously resisted by the energy, the acuteness, the activity, and the expertness which made Mr. Perceval one of the first debaters of his day; although, after his death, the struggle was maintained by the father of the system[1] with all his fire and with his full knowledge of the subject—nay, although" the Ministry risked their existence on the question, the victory remained with the petitioners. The Orders in Council were abolished, and the efficacy of agitation proved. "The Session of 1816 offered an example yet more remarkable of the same tactics being attended with signal success. On the termination of the war, the Government were determined, instead of repealing the whole income tax, which the law declared to be 'for and during the continuance of the war, and no longer,' to retain one-half of it." "As soon as his intention was announced, several meetings were held." Some petitions were presented. Mr. Brougham declared that, if the motion "were pressed on Thursday, he should avail himself of the forms of the House". Of course, the unpopularity of paying money was decisive; the income tax fell. The same faculty of aggression, which had been so successful, in these instances, was immediately so applied as to give voice to the sullenness of the country; to express forms of discontent as real, though not with an object as determinate.

Mr. Brougham did not understate his case. "There is

[1] Mr. Stephen.

one branch of the subject which I shall pass over altogether—I mean the amount of the distresses which are now universally admitted to prevail over almost every part of the empire. Upon this topic all men are agreed; the statements connected with it are as unquestionable as they are afflicting." Nor did he shrink from detail. "I shall suppose," he observed to the House, "a farm of 400 acres of fair, good land, yielding a rent of from £500 to £600 a year." "It will require a four years' course—200 acres being in corn, 100 in fallow, and 100 in hay and grass;" and he seems to prove that at least it *ought* not to answer, "independently of the great rise in lime and all sorts of manure". The commercial mania of the time takes its turn in the description. "After the cramped state in which the enemy's measures and our own retaliation [as we termed it] had kept our trade for some years, when the events of spring 1814 suddenly opened the continent, a rage for exporting goods of every kind burst forth, only to be explained by reflecting on the previous restrictions we had been labouring under, and only to be equalled [though not in extent] by some of the mercantile delusions connected with South American speculations. Everything that could be shipped was sent off; all the capital that could be laid hold of was embarked. The frenzy, I can call it nothing less, after the experience of 1806 and 1810, descended to persons in the humblest circumstances and the farthest removed, by their pursuits, from commercial cares. It may give the committee some idea of this disease, if I state what I know to have happened in one or two places. Not only clerks and labourers, but menial servants, engaged the little sums which they had been laying up for a provision against old age and sickness; persons went round tempting them to adventure in the trade to Holland, and Germany, and the Baltic; they risked their mite in the hopes of boundless profits; it went with the millions of the more regular traders: the bubble soon burst, like its predecessors of the South Sea, the Mississippi, and Buenos Ayres: English goods were selling for much less in Holland and the north of Europe than in London and Manchester; in most places they were lying a dead weight without any sale at all;

and either no returns whatever were received, or pounds came back for thousands that had gone forth. The great speculators broke; the middling ones lingered out a precarious existence, deprived of all means of continuing their dealings either at home or abroad; the poorer dupes of the delusion had lost their little hoards, and went upon the parish; but the result of the whole has been much commercial distress—a caution now absolutely necessary in trying new adventures—a prodigious diminution in the demand for manufactures, and indirectly a serious defalcation in the effectual demand for the produce of land."

Next year Mr. Brougham described as the worst season ever known. The year 1812, a year before esteemed one of much suffering, rose in comparison to one of actual prosperity. He began with the "clothing, a branch of trade which, from accidental circumstances, is not as depressed as our other great staples"; he passed to the iron trade, etc., etc. He dilated on the distress, the discontent and suffering of the people. Of course, the Government were to blame. He moved that the "unexampled" difficulties of trade and manufactures were "materially increased by the policy pursued with respect to our foreign commerce—that the continuance of these difficulties is in a great degree owing to the severe pressure of taxation under which the country labours and which ought by every practicable means to be lightened—that the system of foreign policy pursued by His Majesty's ministers has not been such as to obtain for the people of this country those commercial advantages which the influence of Great Britain in foreign countries fairly entitled them to expect". As became a pupil of the Edinburgh University, Mr. Brougham was not averse to political economy. He was ready to discuss the theory of rent or the corn laws. He made a speech, which he relates as having had a greater success than any other which he made in Parliament, in support of Mr. Calcraft's amendment, to "substitute £192,638 4s. 9d. for £385,276 9s. 6d., the estimate for the household troops". Foreign policy was a favourite topic. Almost unsupported, as he said some years after, he attacked the Holy Alliance. Looking back through

the softening atmosphere of reminiscence, he almost seems to have a kindness for Lord Castlereagh. He remembers with pleasure the utter "courage with which he exposed himself unabashed to the most critical audience in the world, while incapable of uttering anything but the meanest matter, expressed in the most wretched language"; nor has he "forgotten the kind of pride that mantled on the fronts of the Tory phalanx when, after being overwhelmed with the fire of the Whig Opposition, or galled by the fierce denunciations of the Mountain, or harassed by the splendid displays of Mr. Canning, their chosen leader stood forth, and presenting the graces of his eminently patrician figure, flung open his coat, displayed an azure ribbon traversing a snow-white chest, and declared his high satisfaction that he could now meet the charges against him face to face, and repel with indignation all that his adversaries had been bold and rash enough to advance". But the "Mr. Brougham" of that time showed no admiration; no denunciations were stronger than his; no sarcasm impinged more deeply; if the "noble lord in the blue ribbon" wished any one out of the House, the "man from the Northern Circuit" was probably that one. Kings and emperors met with little mercy, and later years have shown how little was merited by the petty absolutism and unthinking narrowness of that time.

That Mr. Brougham indissolubly connected the education movement with his name everybody knows, but scarcely any one remembers how unpopular that movement was. Mr. Windham had said, some years before, "that the diffusion of knowledge was proper, might be supported by many good arguments; but he confessed he was a sceptic on that point. It was said, Look at the state of the savages as compared with ours. A savage among savages was *very well*, and the difference was only perceived when he came to be introduced into civilised society." "His friend, Dr. Johnson, was of opinion that it was not right to teach reading beyond a certain extent in society." The same feeling continued. Mr. Peel, in his blandest tones, attacked the education committee. Lord Stowell, not without sagacity, observed, "If you provide a

larger amount of highly-cultivated talent than there is a demand for, the surplus is very likely to turn sour". Such were the sentiments of some of the best scholars of that era; and so went all orthodox sentiment. That education was the same as republicanism, and republicanism as infidelity, half the curates believed. But, in spite of all this opposition, perhaps with more relish on account of it, Mr. Brougham was ever ready. He was a kind of prophet of knowledge. His voice was heard in the streets. He preached the gospel of the alphabet; he sang the praises of the primer all the day long. "Practical observations," "discourses," "speeches," exist, terrible to all men now. To the kind of education then advocated there may be objections. We may object to the kind of "knowledge" then most sought after; but there can be no doubt that those who then laboured in its behalf must be praised for having inculcated, in the horrid heat of day, as a boring paradox what is now a boring commonplace.

Our space would fail us if we were to attempt to recount Brougham's labours on the slavery question, on George IV. and Queen Caroline, or his hundred encounters with the routine statesmen. The series commenced at the Peace, but it continued for many years. Is not its history written in the chronicles of Parliament? You must turn the leaves—no unpleasant reading—of those old debates, and observe how often Mr. Brougham's name occurs, and on what cumbrous subjects, before you can estimate the frequency of his attacks and the harassing harshness of his labour. One especial subject was his more than any other man's—law reform. He had Romilly and Mackintosh as fellow-labourers in the amelioration of the penal code; he had their support, and that of some others, in his incessant narrations of the grievances of individuals, and denunciations of the unfeeling unthinkingness of our Home administration; but no man grappled so boldly—we had almost said so coarsely—with the crude complexities of our civil jurisprudence: for a rougher nature, a more varied knowledge of action than we can expect of philanthropists were needed for that task. The subject was most difficult to deal with. The English commerce and civilisation had grown up in the

meshes of a half-feudal code, further complicated with the curious narrowness and spirit of chicane which haunt everywhere the law-courts of early times. The technicality which produced the evil made the remedy more difficult. There was no general public opinion on the manner of reform; the public felt the evil, but no one could judge of the efficacy of a remedy, save persons studious in complicated learning, who would hardly be expected to show how that learning could be rendered useless —hardly, indeed, to imagine a world in which it did not exist. The old creed, that these ingenious abuses were the last "perfection of reason," still lingered. It must give Lord Brougham some pride to reflect how many of the improvements which he was the first to popularise, if not to suggest, have been adopted —how many old abuses of detail, which he first indicated to Parliament, exist no longer—how many more are now admitted by everybody to be abuses, though the mode of abolition is contested. The speech on law reform, which he published in the collected edition of his speeches, is nearly a summary of all that has been done or suggested in common or civil law reform for the last thirty years. The effect which so bold an attack on so many things by a single person produced in that conservative time was prodigious. "There never was such a nuisance as the man is," said an old lawyer whom we knew; and he expressed the feeling of his profession. If we add, that beside all these minor reforms and secondary agitations, Mr. Brougham was a bold advocate of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform—the largest heresies of that epoch—we may begin to understand the sarcasm of Mr. Canning: "The honourable and learned gentleman having in the course of his parliamentary life supported or proposed *almost every species of innovation* which could be practised on the constitution, it was not very easy for ministers to do anything without seeming to borrow from him. Break away in what direction they would, whether to the right or to the left, it was all alike. 'Oh,' said the honourable gentleman, 'I was there before you: you would not have thought of that if I had not given you a hint.' In the reign of Queen Anne there was a sage and grave critic of the name of Dennis, who in his old age got it into his

head that he had written all the good plays which were acted at that time. At last a tragedy came forth with a most imposing display of hail and thunder. At the first peal, Dennis exclaimed: 'That is my thunder!' So with the honourable and learned gentleman; there was no noise astir for the good of mankind in any part of the world, but he instantly claimed it for his thunder." We may have wearied our readers with these long references to old conflicts, but it was necessary. We are familiar with the aberrations of the ex-Chancellor; we forget how bold, how efficacious, how varied was the activity of Henry Brougham.

There are several qualities in his genius which make such a life peculiarly suited to him. The first of these is an aggressive, impulsive disposition. Most people may admit that the world goes ill; old abuses seem to exist, questionable details to abound. Hardly any one thinks that anything may not be made better. But how to improve the world, to repair the defects, is a difficulty. Immobility is a part of man. A sluggish conservatism is the basis of our English nature. "*Learn*, my son," said the satirist, "to bear tranquilly the calamities of others." We easily learn it. Most men have a line of life, and it imposes certain duties which they fulfil; but they cannot be induced to start out of that line. We dwell in "a firm basis of content". "Let the mad world go its own way, for it will go its own way." There is no doctrine of the English Church more agreeable to our instinctive taste than that which forbids all works of supererogation. "You did a thing without being obliged," said an eminent statesman: "then that must be wrong." We travel in the track. Lord Brougham is the opposite of this. It is not difficult to him to attack abuses. The more difficult thing for him would be to live in a world without abuses. An intense excitability is in his nature. He must "go off". He is eager to reform corruption, and rushes out to refute error. A tolerant placidity is altogether denied to him.

And not only is this excitability eager, it is many-sided. The men who have in general exerted themselves in labours for others, have generally been rather of a brooding nature;

certain ideas, views and feelings have impressed themselves on them in solitude; they come forth with them among the crowd, but they have no part in its diversified life. They are almost irritated by it. They have no conception except of their cause; they are abstracted in one thought, pained with the dizziness of a heated idea. There is nothing of this in Brougham. He is excited by what he sees. The stimulus is from without. He saw the technicalities of the law-courts; observed a charitable trustee misusing the charity moneys; perceived that George IV. oppressed Queen Caroline; went to Old Sarum. He is not absorbed in a creed: he is pricked by facts. Accordingly, his activity is miscellaneous. The votary of a doctrine is concentrated, for the logical consequences of a doctrine are limited. But an open-minded man, who is aroused by what he sees, quick at discerning abuses, ready to reform anything which he thinks goes wrong—will never have done acting. The details of life are endless, and each of them may go wrong in a hundred ways.

Another faculty of Brougham (in metaphysics it is perhaps but a phase of the same) is the faculty of easy anger. The supine placidity of civilisation is not favourable to animosity. A placid Conservative is perhaps a little pleased that the world is going a *little* ill. Lord Brougham does not feel this. Like an Englishman on the Continent, he is ready to blow up any one. He is a Jonah of detail; he is angry at the dust of life, and wroth at the misfeasances of *employés*. The most reverberating of bastinadoes is the official mind basted by Brougham. You did *this* wrong; why did you omit *that?* Document C ought to be on the third file; paper D is wrongly docketed in the ninth file. Red tape will scarcely succeed when it is questioned; you should take it as Don Quixote did his helmet, without examination, for a most excellent helmet. A vehement, industrious man proposing to untie papers and not proposing to spare errors, is the terror of a respectable administrator. "Such an impracticable man, sir, interfering with the *office*, attacking private character, messing in what cannot concern him." These are the jibes which attend an irritable anxiety for the good of others. They have attended Lord Brougham

through life. He has enough of misanthropy to be a philanthropist.

How much of this is temper, and how much public spirit, it is not for any one to attempt to say. That a natural pleasure in wrath is part of his character, no one who has studied the career of Brougham can doubt. But no fair person can doubt either that he showed on many great occasions—and, what is more, on many petty occasions—a rare zeal for the public welfare. He may not be capable of the settled calm by which the world is best administered. There is a want of consistency in his goodness, of concentration in his action. The gusts of passion pass over him, and he is gone for a time you can scarcely say where. But, though he is the creature of impulse, his impulses are often generous and noble ones. No one would do what he has done, no one could have the intense motive power to do what he has done, without a large share of diffused unselfishness. The irritation of the most acute excitability would not suffice. It is almost an axiom in estimates of human nature, that in its larger operations all that nature must concur. Doubtless there is a thread of calculation in the midst of his impulses; no man rises to be lord chancellor without, at least in lulls and intervals of impulse, a most discriminating and careful judgment of men and things and chances. But after every set-off and abatement, and without any softening of unamiable indications, there will yet remain—and a long series of years will continue to admire it—an eager principle of disinterested action.

Lord Brougham's intellectual powers were as fitted for the functions of a miscellaneous agitator as his moral character. The first of these, perhaps, is a singular faculty of conspicuous labour. In general, the work of agitation proceeds in this way: a conspicuous, fascinating popular orator is ever on the surface, ever ready with appropriate argument, making motions, attracting public attention; beneath and out of sight are innumerable workers and students, unfit for the public eye, getting up the facts, elaborating conclusions, supplying the conspicuous orator with the *data* on which he lives. There is a perpetual controversy, when the narrative of the agitation

comes to be written, whether the merit of what is achieved belongs to the skilful advocate who makes a subtle use of what is provided for him, or the laborious inferiors and juniors who compose the brief and set in order the evidence. For all that comes before the public, Lord Brougham has a wonderful power: he can make motions, addresses, orations, when you wish and on what you wish. He is like a machine for moving amendments. He can keep at work any number of persons under him. Every agitation has a tendency to have an office; some league, some society, some body of labourers must work regularly at its details. Mr. Brougham was able to rush hither and thither through a hundred such kinds of men, and gather up the whole stock of the most recent information, the extreme decimals of the statistics, and diffuse them immediately with eager comment to a listening world. This may not be, indeed is not, the strictest and most straining kind of labour; the anxious, wearing, verifying, self-imposed scrutiny of scattered and complicated details is a far more exhausting task; it is this which makes the eye dim and the face pale and the mind heavy. The excitement of a multifarious agitation will carry the energies through much; the last touches, and it is these which exhaust, need not be put on any one subject. Yet, after all deductions, such a career requires a quantity far surpassing all that most men have of life and *verve* and mind.

Another advantage of Lord Brougham is his extreme readiness; what he can do, he can do at a moment's notice. He has always had this power. Lord Holland, in his Memoirs referring to transactions which took place many years ago, gives an illustration of it. "The management of our press," he is speaking of the question of the general election of 1807, "fell into the hands of Mr. Brougham. With that active and able individual I had become acquainted through Mr. Allen in 1805. At the formation of Lord Grenville's ministry, he had written, at my suggestion, a pamphlet called *The State of the Nation.* He subsequently accompanied Lord Rosslyn to Lisbon. His early connection with the Abolitionists had familiarised him with the means of circulating political papers, and giving him some weight with those best qualified to co-

operate in such an undertaking. His extensive knowledge, his extraordinary readiness, his assiduity and habits of composition, enabled him to correct some articles, and to furnish a prodigious number himself. With partial and scanty assistance from Mr. Allen, myself, and one or two more, he in the course of a few days filled every bookseller's shop with pamphlets—most London newspapers, and all country ones without exception, with paragraphs—and supplied a large portion of the boroughs throughout the kingdom with handbills adapted to the local interests of the candidates, and all tending to enforce the conduct, elucidate the measures, or expose the adversaries of the Whigs."

Another power which was early remarked of Brougham, and which is as necessary as any to an important leader in great movements, is a skilful manipulation of men. Sir James Mackintosh noted in his Journal, on 30th January, 1818: "The address and insinuation of Brougham are so great, that nothing but the bad temper which he cannot always hide could hinder him from mastering everybody as he does Romilly. He *leads* others to his opinion; he generally appears at first to concur with theirs, and never more than half opposes it at once. This management is helped by an air of easy frankness that would lay suspicion itself asleep. He will place himself at the head of an opposition among whom he is unpopular; he will conquer the House of Commons, who hate, but now begin to fear him." An observer of faces would fancy he noted in Lord Brougham this pliant astuteness marred by ill-temper. It has marked his career.

Another essential quality in multifarious agitation is an extreme versatility. No one can deny Lord Brougham this. An apparently close observer has described him. "Take the routine of a day, for instance. In his early life he has been known to attend, in his place in court, on circuit, at an early hour in the morning. After having successfully pleaded the cause of his client, he drives off to the hustings, and delivers, at different places, eloquent and spirited speeches to the electors. He then sits down in the retirement of his closet to pen an address to the Glasgow students, perhaps, or an elaborate article

in the *Edinburgh Review*. The active labours of the day are closed with preparation for the court business of the following morning; and then, in place of retiring to rest, as ordinary men would after such exertions, he spends the night in abstruse study, or on social intercourse with some friend from whom he has been long separated. Yet he would be seen, as early as eight on the following morning, actively engaged in the court, in defence of some unfortunate object of Government persecution, astonishing the auditory, and his fellow-lawyers no less, with the freshness and power of his eloquence. A fair contrast with this history of a day, in early life, would be that of one at a more advanced period; say, in the year 1832. A watchful observer might see the new Lord Chancellor seated in the court over which he presided, from an early hour in the morning until the afternoon, listening to the arguments of counsel, and mastering the points of cases with a grasp of mind that enabled him to give those speedy and unembarrassed judgments that have so injured him with the profession. If he followed his course, he would see him, soon after the opening of the House of Lords, addressing their lordships on some intricate question of law, with an acuteness that drew down approbation even from his opponents; or, on some all-engrossing political topic, casting firebrands into the camp of the enemy, and awakening them from the complacent repose of conviction to the hot contests with more active and inquiring intellects. Then, in an hour or so, he might follow him to the Mechanics' Institution, and hear an able and stimulating discourse on education, admirably adapted to the peculiar capacity of his auditors; and towards ten, perhaps, at a Literary and Scientific Institution in Marylebone, the same Proteus-like intellect might be found expounding the intricacies of physical science with a never-tiring and elastic power. Yet, during all those multitudinous exertions, time would be found for the composition of a discourse on Natural Theology, that bears no marks of haste or excitement of mind, but presents as calm a face as though it had been the laborious production of a contemplative philosopher." We may differ in our estimate of the *quality* of these various efforts; but no one can deny to

him who was capable of them a great share in what Adam Smith mentioned as one of the most important facilities to the intellectual labourer—a quickness in "changing his hand".

Nor would any of these powers be sufficient, without that which is, in some sense, the principle of them all—an enterprising intellect. In the present day this is among the rarest of gifts. The speciality of pursuits is attended with a timidity of mind. Each subject is given up to men who cultivate it, and it only; who are familiar with its niceties and absorbed in its details. There is no one who dares to look at the whole. "I have taken *all* knowledge to be my province," said Lord Bacon. The notion, and still more the expression of it, seems ridiculous now. The survey of each plot in the world of knowledge is becoming more complete. We shall have a plan of each soon, on a seven-inch scale; but we are losing the picturesque pictures of the outside and surface of knowledge in the survey of its whole. We have the petty survey, as we say, but no chart, no globe of the entire world; no bold sketch of its obvious phenomena, as they strike the wayfarer and impress themselves on the imagination. The man of the speciality cannot describe the large outlines; he is too close upon the *minutiæ;* he does not know the relations of other knowledge, and no one else dares to infringe on his province—on the "study of his life"—for fear of committing errors in detail which he alone knows, and which he may expose. Lord Brougham has nothing of this cowardice. He is ready to give, in their boldest and most general form, the rough outlines of knowledge as they strike the man of the world, occupied in its affairs and familiar with its wishes. He is not cooped up in a single topic, and he has no dread of those who are. He may fall into error, but he exhibits a subject as it is seen by those who know other subjects, by a man who knows the world; he at least attempts an embracing conception of his topic, he makes you feel its connection with reality and affairs. He has exhibited this virtue at all stages of his career, but it was most valuable in his earlier time. There is no requisite so important as intellectual courage in one who seeks to improve all things in all ways.

His oratory also suits the character of the hundred-subject agitator well. It is rough-and-ready. It abounds in sarcasm, in vituperation, in aggression. It does not shrink from detail. It would batter anything at any moment. We may think as we will on its merits as a work of art, but no one can deny its exact adaptation to a versatile and rushing agitator—to a Tribune of detail.

The deficiencies of Brougham's character—in some cases they seem but the unfavourable aspects of its excellences—were also fitted for his earlier career. The first of these, to say it in a sentence, is the want of a thinking intellect. A miscellaneous agitator must be ready to catch at anything, to attack everything, to blame any one. This is not the life for a mind of anxious deliberation. The patient philosopher, who is cautious in his positions, dubious of his data, slow in his conclusions, must fail at once. He would be investigating while he should attack, inquiring while he should speak. He could not act upon a chance; the moment of action would be gone. A sanguine and speedy intellect, ready to acquire, by its very idea all but excludes the examining, scrupulous, hesitating intellect which reflects.

Nor would a man of very sensitive judgment endure such a career. An agitator must err by excess; a delicate nature errs by defects. There is a certain coarseness in the abusive breed. A Cleon should not feel failure. No man has ever praised very highly Lord Brougham's judgment; but to have exceedingly improved it would perhaps have impaired his earlier utility. You might as fitly employ some delicate lady as a rough-rider, as a man of a poising, refining judgment in the task of a grievance-stater.

Harsh nerves, too, are no disadvantage. Perhaps they are essential. Very nice nerves would shrink from a scattered and jangled life. Three days out of six the sensitive frame would be jarred, the agitator would be useless. It is possible, indeed, to imagine that in a single noble cause—a cause that would light up the imagination, that would move the inner soul, a temperament the most delicate, a frame that is most poetic, might well be absorbingly interested. A little of such

qualities may be essential. The apostle of a creed must have the nature to comprehend that creed; his fancy must take it in, his feelings realise it, his nature absorb it. To move the finer nature, you need the deeper nature. Perhaps even in a meaner cause, in a cause which should take a hold on the moving mob, sway the masses, rule the popular fancy, rough as the task of the mob-orator is, you require the delicate imagination. One finds some trace of it—still more of what is its natural accompaniment, a sweet nature—buried in the huge frame and coarse exterior of O'Connell. No unpoetic heart could touch the Irish people. Lord Brougham is prose itself. He was described, many years ago, as excelling all men in a knowledge of the course of exchange. "He is," continued the satirist,[1] "apprised of the exact state of our exports and imports, and scarce a ship clears out its cargo at Liverpool or Hull but he has the notice of the bill of lading." To explain the grievances of men of business needs no poetic nature. It scarcely needs the highest powers of invective. There is something nearly ridiculous in being the "Mirabeau of sums".

There is a last quality which is difficult to describe in the language of books, but which Lord Brougham excels in, and which has perhaps been of more value to him than all his other qualities put together. In the speech of ordinary men it is called "devil"; persons instructed in the German language call it "the demonic element". What it is one can hardly express in a single sentence. It is most easily explained by physiognomy. There is a glare in some men's eyes which seems to say, "Beware, I am dangerous; *noli me tangere*". Lord Brougham's face has this. A mischievous excitability is the most obvious expression of it. If he were a horse, nobody would buy him; with that eye, no one could answer for his temper. Such men are often not really resolute, but they are not pleasant to be near in a difficulty. They have an aggressive eagerness which is formidable. They would kick against the pricks sooner than not kick at all. A little of the demon is excellent for an agitator.

[1] Hazlitt.

His peculiar adaptation to his peculiar career raised Mr. Brougham, in a few years, to a position such as few men have ever obtained in England—such as no other man perhaps has attained by popular agitation. When he became member for Yorkshire, in 1830, he was a power in the country. The cause which he was advocating had grown of itself. The power of the middle classes, especially of the commercial classes, had increased. Lord Eldon was retiring. Lord Sidmouth had retired. What we now call "liberality" was coming into fashion. Men no longer regarded the half-feudal constitution as a "form of thought". Argument was at least thought fair. And this seems likely and natural. No one can wonder that the influence of men of business grew with the development of business, and they adopted the plain, straightforward, cautious creed, which we now know to be congenial to them. It is much more difficult to explain how reform became a passion. The state of the public mind during the crisis of the Reform Bill is one which those who cannot remember it cannot understand. The popular enthusiasm, the intense excitement, the rush of converts, the union of rectors and squires with those against whom they had respectively so long preached and sworn, the acclamation for the "whole bill and nothing but the bill," are become utterly strange. As the first French Assembly in a single night abolished, with public outcry, the essential abuses of the old *régime*, so our fathers at once, and with enthusiasm, abolished the close boroughs and the old representation, the lingering abuses of half-feudal England. The present Frenchmen are said not to comprehend August 4: we can hardly understand the year '32. An apathy has fallen upon us. But we can, nevertheless, and without theorising, comprehend what an advantage such an enthusiasm was to the Liberals of that time. Most Whig ministries have been like Low-Church bishops. There is a feeling that the advocates of liberty ought scarcely to coerce; they have ruled, but they seem to deny the succession by which they ruled; they have been distrusted by a vague and half-conservative sentiment. In the tumult of 1832

all such feelings were carried away. Toryism was abolished with delight.

Mr. Brougham was among the first to share the advantage. There is a legend that in the first Whig ministry Lord Brougham was offered the post of Attorney-General, and that he only replied by disdainfully tearing up the letter containing the offer. Whether the anecdote be literally true or not, we cannot say. The first of the modern Whig ministries is in the post-historical period. We have not yet enough of contemporary evidence to be sure of its details: years must pass before the memoir-writers can accumulate. But in spirit the tale is doubtless accurate. Lord Grey did not wish to make Mr. Brougham Lord Chancellor, and Mr. Brougham refused any inferior place as beneath his merits and his influence. The first Whig ministry was, indeed, in a position of some difficulty. The notion that a successful Opposition, as such, should take the reins of administration, has been much derided. "Sir," said a sceptic on this part of constitutional government, "I would as soon choose for a new coachman the man who shied stones best at my old one!" And, without going the length of such critics, it must be allowed that the theory may produce odd results, when the persons summoned by their victory to assume office have been for many years in opposition. The party cannot have acquired official habits: the traditions of business cannot be known to them; their long course of opposition will have forced into leadership men hardly fitted for placid government. There is said to have been much of this feeling when Lord Grey's ministry was installed; it seemed as if that "old favourite of the public," Mr. Buckstone, were called to license plays. Grave Englishmen doubted the gravity of the administration. To make Lord Brougham Chancellor was, therefore, particularly inconvenient. He was too mobile; you could not fancy him droning. He had attacked Lord Eldon during many years, of course; but did he know law? He was a most active person; would he sit *still* upon the woolsack? Of his inattention to his profession men circulated idle tales. "Pity he hadn't known a little law, and then he would have known a little of every-

thing," was the remark of one who certainly only knows one thing. A more circumstantial person recounted that, when Brougham had been a pupil of Sir Nicholas Tindal, in the Temple, an uncle of his, having high hopes of his ability, asked the latter: "I hope my nephew is giving himself up, soul and body, to his profession?" "I do not know anything," replied the distinct special-pleader, "as to his *soul*, but his body is very seldom in my chambers." Putting aside with contempt this surface of tales, it could not be denied that Mr. Brougham's practice at the bar—large and lucrative as it was—immense as was the energy required to maintain it at the same time with his other labours—had yet not shown him to possess the finest discretion, the most delicate tact of the advocate. Mr. Scarlett stole verdicts away from him. "He strikes hard, sir," said an attorney; "but he strikes wrong." His appointment as Chancellor scarcely strengthened the ministry of the time. Mr. Brougham was a hero; Lord Brougham was "a necessity". It was like Mr. Disraeli being Chancellor of the Exchequer.

After the lapse of years, and with the actual facts before us, it is not difficult to see how far these anticipations have been falsified, and how far they have been justified, by the result. All the notions as to Lord Brougham's ignorance of law may at once be discarded. A man of his general culture and vigorous faculties, with a great memory and much experience in forensic business, is no more likely to be ignorant of the essential bookwork of law than a tailor to be ignorant of scissors and seams. A man in business must be brought in contact with it; a man of mind cannot help grasping it. No one now questions that Lord Brougham was and is a lawyer of adequate attainments. But, at the same time, the judgments which supply the conclusive proof of this—the complete refutation of earlier cavillers—also would lead us to deny him the praise of an absolutely judicious intellect. Great judges may be divided into two classes—judges for the parties, and judges for the lawyers. The first class of these are men who always decide the particular case before them rightly, who have a nice insight into all that concerns it, are

acute discerners of fact, accurate weighers of testimony, just discriminators of argument. Lord Lyndhurst is perhaps as great a judge in this kind as it is easy to fancy. If a wise man had a good cause, he would prefer its being tried before Lyndhurst to its being tried before any one else. For the "parties," if they were to be considered in litigation, no more would be needed. By law-students, however, and for the profession, something more is desired. They like to find, in a judicial decision, not only a correct adjustment of the particular dispute in court, but also an ample exposition of principles applicable to other disputes. The judge who is peculiarly exact in detecting the precise peculiarities of the case before him, will be very apt to decide only what is essential to, absolutely needed by, that case. His delicate discrimination will see that nothing else is necessary; he will not bestow conclusions on after-generations; he will let posterity decide its own controversies. A judge of different kind has a professional interest in what comes before him: it is in his eyes not a pitiful dispute whether A or B is entitled to a miserable field, but a glorious opportunity of deciding some legal controversy on which he has brooded for years, and on which he has a ready-made conclusion. Accordingly, his judgments are in the nature of essays. They are, in one sense, applicable to the matter in hand—they decide it correctly; but they go so much into the antecedents of the controversy—give so much of principle—that the particular facts seem a little lost: the general doctrine fills the attention. No one can read a judgment of the late Lord Cottenham without feeling that it fixed the law on the matter in hand upon a defined basis for future years. Very likely he finds an authority for the case which has occurred in his practice; he does not stay to inquire whether the litigants appreciated the learning; perhaps they did not—possibly they would have preferred that a more exclusive prominence should be given to themselves. Now Lord Brougham has neither of these qualities; his intellect wants the piercing precision which distinguishes the judge—the unerring judge—of the case then present; and though competently learned, he has never been absorbed in

his profession, as a judge of "principle" almost always must be. A man cannot provide a dogma suiting all the cases of the past, and deciding all the cases for the future without years of patient reflection. His mind must be stored with doctrines. No one can fancy this of Lord Brougham. He is not to be thought of as giving still attention to technical tenets, years of brooding consideration to an abstract jurisprudence. Accordingly, though an adequate, and in his time—for his speed cleared off arrears—a most useful judge, he cannot be said to attain the first rank in the judicial scale; and such we believe is the estimation of the world.

Of the political duties of the Chancellor, and Lord Brougham's performance of them, it is not easy to speak. Many of them are necessarily secret, and the history of those times cannot yet be written. That he showed wonderful energy, zeal, and power, no one can doubt; nor that the essential defects of his character soon showed him but little qualified for an administrator. In the year 1802, Francis Horner anticipated, that if "an active career were opened to Brougham, he would show a want of prudence and moderation"; and it is curious to read, as a commentary on it, what the Duke of Wellington wrote to Sir R. Peel, on the 15th November, 1835. "His Majesty mentioned that Lord Brougham[1] had threatened he would not put the great seal to a commission to prorogue the parliament;" and afterwards correcting himself: "It appears that Lord Brougham did not make the threat that he would not prorogue the parliament, but that Lord Melbourne said he was in such a state of excitement that he might take that course". We must wait for Lord Brougham's memoirs before we know the exact history of that time; but all the glimpses we get of it show the same picture of wildness and eccentricity.

The times—the most nearly revolutionary times which England has long seen—were indeed likely to try an excitable temperament to the utmost; but at the same time they

[1] The editors of Sir R. Peel's *Memoirs* have left this name in blank; but if they had wished it not to be known, they should have suppressed the passage. Everybody knows who held the great seal at that time.

afforded scope to a brilliant manager of men, which only such critical momentary conjunctures can do. Mr. Roebuck gives a curious instance of this :—

"The necessity of a dissolution had long been foreseen and decided on by the ministers ; but the king had not yet been persuaded to consent to so bold a measure ; and now the two chiefs of the administration were about to intrude themselves into the royal closet, not only to advise and ask for a dissolution, but to request the king on the sudden—on this very day, and within a few hours—to go down and put an end to his parliament in the midst of the session, and with all the ordinary business of the session yet unfinished. The bolder mind of the Chancellor took the lead, and Lord Grey anxiously solicited him to *manage* the king on the occasion. So soon as they were admitted, the Chancellor, with some care and circumlocution, propounded to the king the object of the interview they had sought. The startled monarch no sooner understood the drift of the Chancellor's somewhat periphrastic statement, than he exclaimed in wonder and amazement against the very idea of such a proceeding. 'How is it possible, my lords, that I can after this fashion repay the kindness of parliament to the queen and myself? They have just granted me a most liberal civil list, and to the queen a splendid annuity in case she survives me.' The Chancellor confessed that they had, as regarded his Majesty, been a liberal and wise parliament, but said that nevertheless their further existence was incompatible with the peace and safety of the kingdom. Both he and Lord Grey then strenuously insisted upon the absolute necessity of their request, and gave his Majesty to understand that this advice was by his ministers unanimously resolved on ; and that they felt themselves unable to conduct the affairs of the country in the present condition of the parliament. This last statement made the king feel that a general resignation would be the consequence of a further refusal. Of this, in spite of his secret wishes, he was at the moment really afraid ; and therefore, he, by employing petty excuses, and suggesting small and temporary difficulties, soon began to show that he was about to yield. 'But, my lords, nothing is prepared ; the great officers of state are not summoned.' 'Pardon me, sir,' said the Chancellor, bowing with profound apparent humility, 'we have taken the great liberty of giving them to understand that your Majesty commanded their attendance at the proper hour.' 'But, my lords, the crown and the robes, and other things needed are not prepared.' 'Again I most humbly entreat your Majesty's pardon for my boldness,' said the Chancellor ; 'they are all prepared and ready—the proper officers being desired to attend in proper form and time.' 'But, my lords,' said the king reiterating the form in which he put his objection, 'you know the thing is wholly impossible ; the guards, the troops, have had no orders, and cannot be ready in time.' This objection was in reality the most

formidable one. The orders to the troops on such occasions emanate always directly from the king, and no person but the king can in truth command them for such service; and as the Prime Minister and daring Chancellor well knew the nature of royal susceptibility on such matters, they were in no slight degree doubtful and anxious as to the result. The Chancellor, therefore, with some real hesitation, began again as before, 'Pardon me, sir, we know how bold the step is that, presuming on your great goodness, and your anxious desire for the safety of your kingdom, and happiness of your people, we have presumed to take. I have given orders and the troops are ready.' The king started in serious anger, flamed red in the face, and burst forth with, 'What, my lords, have you dared to act thus? Such a thing was never heard of. You, my Lord Chancellor, ought to know that such an act is treason, high treason, my lord.' 'Yes, sir,' said the Chancellor, 'I do know it; and nothing but my thorough knowledge of your Majesty's goodness, of your paternal anxiety for the good of your people, and my own solemn belief that the safety of the state depends upon this day's proceedings, could have emboldened me to the performance of so unusual, and, in ordinary circumstances, so improper a proceeding. In all humility I submit myself to your Majesty, and am ready in my own person to bear all the blame, and receive all the punishment which your Majesty may deem needful; but I again entreat your Majesty to listen to us and to follow our counsel, and as you value the security of your crown and the peace of your realms, to yield to our most earnest solicitations.' After some further expostulations by both his ministers, the king cooled down and consented. Having consented, he became anxious that everything should be done in the proper manner, and gave minute directions respecting the ceremonial. The speech to be spoken by him at the prorogation was ready prepared and in the Chancellor's pocket. To this he agreed, desired that everybody might punctually attend, and dismissed his ministers for the moment with something between a menace and a joke upon the audacity of their proceeding."

With the fall of Lord Melbourne's first administration terminated Lord Brougham's administrative career. As every one knows, on the defeat of Sir Robert Peel and the subsequent return of the Whigs to power, he was not invited to resume office. Since that time—for now more than twenty years—he has had to lead the life, in general the most trying to political reputation, perhaps to real character, and more than any other alien to the character of his mind and the tendencies of his nature. We have had many recent instances how difficult it is to give what is variously termed an "independent support," and a "friendly opposition," to a Govern-

ment of which you approve the general tendencies, but are inclined to criticise the particular measures. The Peelites and Lord John Russell have for several years been in general in this position, and generally with a want of popular sympathy. As they agree with the Government in principle, they cannot take, by way of objection, what the country considers broad points; their suggestions of detail seem petty and trivial to others—the public hardly think of such things; but men who have long considered a subject, who have definite ideas and organised plans, can scarcely help feeling an eager interest in the smallest *minutiæ* of the mode of dealing with it. Sometimes they discern a real importance undiscerned by those less attentive; more commonly, perhaps, they fancy there is something peculiarly felicitous in contrivances settled by themselves and congenial to their habits or their notions. Lord Brougham was in a position to feel this peculiarly. The various ideas which he had struggled for in earlier life were successful one by one; the hundred reforms he suggested were carried; the hundred abuses he had denounced were abolished. The world which *was*, was changed to the world which *is;* but it was not changed by him. That he should have been favourably disposed to the existing liberal administrations was not likely; the separation was too recent, perhaps too abrupt. An eager and excitable disposition is little likely to excel in the measured sentences, the chosen moments, the polished calm of the *frondeur*. Accordingly, the life of Brougham for many years has not been favourable to his fame. On particular occasions, as on the abolition of Negro apprenticeship, he might attain something of his former power. But, in general, his position has been that of the agitator whose measure is being substantially carried, yet with differences of detail aggravating to his temper and annoying to his imagination. Mr. Cobden described Sir Robert Peel's mode of repealing the corn-laws with the microscopic sliding-scale for three years, as seventeen-and-sixpence on the demand of the Anti-corn-law League, and good security for the other half-crown. Yet excitable men at that very moment clamoured for the last half-crown; they could not bear the modification,

the minute difference from that on which they had set their hearts. We must remember this in relation to what is now most familiar to us in the life of Lord Brougham. To a man so active, to be put out of action is a pain which few can appreciate; that other men should enter into your labours is not pleasant; that they should be Canningites does not make it any better. We have witnessed many escapades of Lord Brougham; we perhaps hardly know his temptations and his vexations.

Such is the bare outline of the career of Lord Brougham. A life of early, broken, various agitation; a short interval of ordinary administration—occurring, however, at a time singularly extraordinary; a long old age secluded from the actual conduct of affairs, and driven to distinguish itself by miscellaneous objection and diversified sarcasm. Singular stories of eccentricity and excitement, even of something more than either of these, darken these latter years. On these we must not dwell. There are many aspects of Brougham's varied character, a few of which we should notice by themselves.

The most connected with his political life is his career as a law reformer. We have spoken of his early labours on this subject; we have said that few men who have devoted themselves to nothing else have exposed so many abuses, propounded so many remedies; that one of his early motions is a schedule of half, and much more than half, that has been, or will be, done upon a large portion of the subject. But here praise must end. The completed, elaborated reforms by which Lord Brougham will be known to posterity are few, are nothing in comparison with his power, his industry, and his opportunities. There is nothing, perhaps, for which he is so ill qualified. The bold vehement man who exposes an abuse has rarely the skilful, painful, dissecting power which expunges it. Lord Brougham once made a speech on conveyancing. "I should not," said, on the next day, an eminent professor of that art, "like him to draw a deed relating to my property." A law reformer, in order that his work may be perfect, requires the conveyancing abilities. He must be able

to bear in mind the whole topic—to draw out what is necessary of it on paper—to see what is necessary—to discriminate the rights of individuals—to distinguish, with even metaphysical nicety, the advantage he would keep from the abuse he would destroy. He must elaborate enacting clauses which will work in the complicated future, repealing clauses which will not interfere with the complicated machinery of the past. His mind must be the mind of a codifier. A rushing man, like Lord Brougham, cannot hope to have this. A still and patient man, in quiet chambers, apt in niceties, anxious by temperament, precise in habit, putting the last extreme of perfection on whatever he may attempt, is the man for the employment. You must not expect this quiet precision from an agitator. There is the same difference as that between the hard-striking pugilist and the delicate amputating operator.

The same want of repose has repaired his excellence in a pursuit to which, at first sight, it seems much less needful—the art of oratory. We are apt to forget that oratory is an imaginative art. From our habits of business, the name of rhetoric has fallen into disrepute: our greatest artists strive anxiously to conceal their perfection in it; they wish their address in statement to be such, that the effect seems to be produced by that which is stated, and not by the manner in which it is stated. But not the less on that account is there a real exercise of the imagination in conceiving of the events of a long history, in putting them forward in skilful narration, each fact seeming by nature to fall into its place, all the details appearing exactly where they should—a group, to borrow a metaphor from another art, collecting itself from straggling and desultory materials. Still more evidently is the imagination requisite in expressing deep emotions, even common emotions, or in describing noble objects. Now, it seems to be a law of the imagination that it only works in a mind of stillness. The noise and crush of life jar it. "No man," it has been said, "can say, I *will* compose poetry": he must wait until—from a brooding, half-desultory inaction—poetry may arise, like a gentle mist, delicately and of itself.

> "I waited for the train at Coventry;
> I hung with grooms and porters on the bridge
> To watch the three tall spires; and there I shaped
> The city's legend into this." [1]

Lord Brougham would not have waited so. He would have rushed up into the town; he would have suggested an improvement, talked the science of the bridge, explained its history to the natives. The quiet race would think twenty people had been there. And, of course, in some ways this is admirable; such life and force are rare; even the "grooms and porters" would not be insensible to such an aggressive intelligence—so much *knocking* mind. But, in the meantime, no lightly-touched picture of old story would have arisen in his imagination. The city's legend would have been thrust out: the "fairy frostwork" of the fancy would have been struck away: there would have been talk on the schooling of the porter's eldest boy. The rarity of great political oratory arises in a great measure from this circumstance. Only those engaged in the jar of life have the material for it; only those withdrawn into a brooding imagination have the faculty for it. M. de Lamartine has drawn a striking picture of one who had the opportunity of action and the dangerous faculty of leisure: "Vergniaud s'enivrait dans cette vie d'artiste, de musique, de déclamation et de plaisirs; il se pressait de jouir de sa jeunesse, comme s'il eût le pressentiment qu'elle serait sitôt cueillie. Ses habitudes étaient méditatives et paresseuses. Il se levait au milieu du jour; il écrivait peu et sur des feuilles éparses: il appuyait le papier sur ses genoux comme un homme pressé qui se dispute le temps; il composait ses discours lentement dans ses rêveries et les retenait à l'aide de notes dans sa mémoire; il polissait son éloquence a loisir, comme le soldat polit son arme au repos." [2] This is not the picture of one who is to attain eminence in stirring and combative time. Harsher men prevailed; a mournful fate swallowed up Vergniaud's delicate fancies. He died, because he was idle; but he was great, because he was idle. Idleness with such

[1] Tennyson, *Godiva*.

[2] *Histoire des Girondins*, book xviii., ch. ix., p. 88.

minds is only the name for the passive enjoyment of a justly-moving imagination.

We should only weary our readers with a repetition of what has been said a hundred times already, if we tried to explain that Lord Brougham has nothing of this. His merit is, that he was never idle in his life. He must not complain if he has the disadvantage of it also. That he was a most effective speaker in his great time, is of course undoubted. His power of sarcasm, his amazing readiness, his energetic vigour of language, made him, if not a very persuasive, at least a most formidable orator. His endless animation must tell even to excess upon his audience. But he has not acted wisely for his fame in publishing his speeches. They have the most unpardonable of all faults—the fault of dulness. It is scarcely possible to read them. Doubtless, at the time their influence was considerable; they may even have been pleasant, as you like to watch the play of a vicious horse; but now, removed from the hearing of the speaker's voice—out of the way of the motions of his face and the glare of his eye—even their evil-speaking loses its attractiveness. The sarcasm seems blunt—the denunciation heavy. They are crowded with a detail which may have been, though acute observers say it was not, attractive at the time, but which no one can endure now. Not only do you feel that you are bored, but you are not sure that you are instructed. An agitator's detail is scarcely to be trusted. His facts may be right, but you must turn historian in order to test them; you must lead a life of State papers and old letters to know if they are true. It is perhaps possible for the imagination of man to give an interest to any considerable action of human life. A firmly-drawing hand may conduct us through the narration—an enhancing touch enliven the details; but to achieve this with contested facts in a combative life, is among the rarest operations of a rare power. The imagination has few tasks so difficult. To Lord Brougham, least of all, has it been possible to attract men by the business detail and cumbrous aggressions of the last age. His tone is too harsh. He has shattered his contemporaries, but he will not charm posterity.

Lord Brougham has wished to be known, not only as an orator, but as a writer on oratory. He has written a *Discourse on Ancient Oratory*, recommending, and very deservedly, its study to those who would now excel in the art; and there is no denying that he has rivalled the great Greek orator, at least in one of his characteristic excellences. There is no more manly book in the world than Brougham's *Speeches;* he always "calls a spade a spade"; the rough energy strikes; we have none of the tawdry metaphor or half-real finery of the inferior orators, there is not a simile which a man of sense should not own. Nevertheless, we are inclined to question whether his studies on ancient oratory, especially on the great public oration of Demosthenes, have been entirely beneficial to him. These masterly productions were, as every one knows, the eager expression of an intense mind on questions of the best interest; they have accordingly the character of vehemence. Speaking on subjects which he thought involved the very existence of his country, he could not be expected to speak very temperately; he did not, and could not, admit that there was fair ground for difference of opinion; that an equally patriotic person, after proper consideration, could by possibility arrive at an opposite conclusion. The circumstances of the parliamentary orator in this country are quite different. A man cannot discuss the dowry of the Princess Royal, the conditions of the Bank Charter, as if they were questions of existence—all questions arising now present masses of fact, antecedents in blue-books, tabulated statistics, on which it is impossible that there should not be a necessity for an elaborate inquiry—that there should not be discrepancy of judgment after that inquiry. The Demosthenic vehemence is out of place. The calm didactic exposition, almost approaching to that of the lecturer, is more efficacious than the intense appeal of an eager orator. That "Counsellor Broom was all in a fume," is a line in one of the best ludicrous poems of a time rather fertile in such things. On points of detail it is ridiculous to be in a passion; on matters of business it is unpersuasive to be enthusiastic; even on topics less technical, the Greek oratory is scarcely a model to be imitated precisely. A certain

nonchalant ease pervades our modern world—we affect an indifference we scarcely feel; our talk is light, almost to affectation; our best writing is the same; we suggest rather than elaborate, hint rather than declaim. The spirit of the ancient world was very different—the tendency of its conversation probably was to a rhetorical formality, a haranguing energy; certainly it is the tendency of its written style. "With every allowance," says Colonel Mure, "for the peculiar genius of the age in which the masterpieces of Attic prose were produced—a consideration which must always have a certain weight in literary judgments—still, the impartial modern critic cannot but discern in this pervading rhetorical tone a defect, perhaps the only serious defect, in the classical Greek style. . . . It certainly is not natural for the historian or the popular essayist to address his readers in the same tone in which the defender of a client or the denouncer of a political opponent addresses a public assembly."[1] So great a change in the general world, in the audience to be spoken to, requires a change in the speaker. The light touch of Lord Palmerston is more effective than the most elaborated sentences of a formal rhetorician. Of old, when conversation and writing were half oratorical, oratory might be very oratorical; now that conversation is very conversational, oratory must be a little conversational. In real life, Lord Brougham has too much of the orator's tact not to be half aware of this; but his teaching forgets it.

That Lord Brougham should have adopted a theory enjoining vehemence in oratory, is an instance to be cited by those who hold that a man's creed is a justification for his inclinations. He is by nature over-vehement; and what is worse, it is not vehemence of the best kind; there is something of a scream about it. People rather laughed at his kneeling to beseech the peers. No one is sure that there is real feeling in what he reads and hears; it seems like a machine going. Lord Cockburn has an odd anecdote. An old judge, who loved dawdling, disliked the "discomposing qualities" of Brougham. His revenge consisted in sneering

[1] *History of the Language and Literature of Ancient Greece*, vol. iv., p. 17

at Brougham's eloquence, by calling it or him *the Harangue*. "Well, gentlemen, what did *the Harangue* say next? Why it said this (mis-stating it); but, here, gentlemen, *the Harangue* was wrong and not intelligible." We have some feeling for the old judge. If you take a speech of Brougham, and read it apart from his voice, you have half a notion that it is a gong going, eloquence by machinery, an incessant talking *thing*.

It is needless to point out how completely an excitable, ungenial nature, such as we have so much spoken of, incapacitates Lord Brougham for abstract philosophy. His works on that subject are sufficiently numerous, but we are not aware that even his most ardent admirers have considered them as works of really the first class. It would not be difficult to extract from the *Political Philosophy*, which is probably the best of them, singular instances of inconsistency and of confusion. The error was in his writing them; he who runs may *read*, but it does not seem likely he will think. The brooding disposition, and the still, investigating intellect, are necessary for consecutive reasonings on delicate philosophy.

The same qualities, however, fit a man for the acquisition of general information. A man who is always rushing into the street will become familiar with the street. One who is for ever changing from subject to subject will not become *painfully* acquainted with any one, but he will know the outsides of them all, and the road from each to the other. Accordingly, all the descriptions of Lord Brougham, even in his earliest career, speak of his immense information. Mr. Wilberforce, in perhaps the earliest printed notice of him, recommended Mr. Pitt to employ him in a diplomatic capacity, on account of his familiarity with languages, and the other kinds of necessary knowledge. He began by writing on Porisms; only the other day he read a paper on some absurdities imputed to the Integral Calculus, in French, at Paris. It would be in the highest degree tedious to enumerate all the subjects he knows something of. Of course, an extreme correctness cannot be expected. "The most *mis*informed man in Europe," is a phrase of satire; yet, even in its satire, it conveys a compliment to Brougham's information.

An especial interest in physical science may be remarked in Brougham, as in most men of impressible minds in his generation. He came into life when the great discoveries in our knowledge of the material world were either just made, or were on the eve of being made. The enormous advances which have been actually made in material civilisation were half anticipated. There was a vague hope in science. The boundaries of the universe, it was hoped, would move. Active, ardent minds were drawn with extreme hope to the study of new moving power; a smattering of science was immeasurably less common then than now, but it exercised a stronger dominion, and influenced a higher class of genius. It was new, and men were sanguine. In the present day, younger men are perhaps repelled into the opposite extreme. We live among the marvels of science, but we know how little they change us. The essentials of life are what they were. We go by the train, but we are not improved at our journey's end. We have railways, and canals, and manufactures—excellent things, no doubt, but they do not touch the soul. Somehow, they seem to make life more superficial. With a half-wayward dislike, some in the present generation have turned from physical science and material things. "We have tried these, and they fail," is the feeling. "What is the heart of man the better for galvanic engines and hydraulic presses? Leave us to the old poetry and the old philosophy; there is at least a life and a mind." It is the day after the feast. We do not care for its delicacies; we are rather angry at its profusion; we are cross to hear it praised. Men who came into active life half a century ago were the guests invited to the banquet; they did not know what was coming, but they heard it was something gorgeous and great; they expected it with hope and longing. The influence of this feeling was curiously seen in the Useful Knowledge Society, the first great product of the educational movement in which Lord Brougham was the most ardent leader. No one can deny that their labours were important, their intentions excellent, the collision of mind which they created most beneficial. Still, looking to their well-known publications, beyond question the knowledge they particu-

larly wished to diffuse is, according to the German phrase, *factish.* Hazlitt said "they confounded a knowledge of useful things with useful knowledge". An idea, half unconscious, pervades them, that a knowledge of the detail of material knowledge, even too of the dates and shell of outside history, is extremely important to the mass of men; that all will be well when we have a cosmical ploughboy and a mob that knows hydrostatics. We shall never have it; but even if we could, we should not be much the better. The heart and passions of men are moved by things more within their attainment; the essential nature is stirred by the essential life; by the real actual existence of love, and hope, and character, and by the real literature which takes in its spirit, and which is in some sort its undefecated essence. Thirty years ago the preachers of this now familiar doctrine were unknown, nor was their gospel for a moment the one perhaps most in season. It was good that there should be a more diffused knowledge of the material world; and it was good, therefore, that there should be partisans of matter, believers in particles, zealots for tissue, who were ready to incur any odium and any labour that a few more men might learn a few more things. How a man of incessant activity should pass easily to such a creed is evident. He would see the obvious ignorance. The less obvious argument, which shows that this ignorance, in great measure inevitable, was of far less importance than would be thought at first sight, would never be found by one who moved so rapidly.

We have gone through now, in some hasty way, most of the lights in which Lord Brougham has been regarded by his contemporaries. There is still another character in which posterity will especially think of him. He is a great memoirist. His *Statesmen of George III.* contains the best sketches of the political men of his generation, one with another, which the world has, or is likely to have. He is a fine painter of the exterior of human nature. Some portion of its essence requires a deeper character; another portion, more delicate sensations; but of the rough appearance of men, as they struck him in the law-court and in Parliament—of the great debater struggling with

his words—the stealthy advocate gliding into the confidence of the audience—the great judge unravelling all controversies, and deciding by a well-weighed word all complicated doubts—of such men as these, and of men engaged in such tasks as these, there is no greater painter perhaps than Brougham. His eager aggressive disposition brought him into collision with conspicuous men; his skill in the obvious parts of human nature has made him understand them. A man who has knocked his head against a wall—if such an illustration is to be hazarded—will learn the nature of the wall. Those who have passed fifty years in managing men of the world will know their external nature, and, if they have literary power enough, will describe it. In general, Lord Brougham's excellence as a describer of character is confined to men whom he had thus personally and keenly encountered. The sketches of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, of French statesmen, are poor and meagre. He requires evidently the rough necessities of action to make him observe. There is, however, a remarkable exception. He preserves a singularly vivid recollection of the instructors of his youth; he nowhere appears so amiable as in describing them. He is over-partial, no doubt; but an old man may be permitted to reverence, if he can reverence, his schoolmaster.

This is all that our limits will permit us to say of Lord Brougham. On so varied a life, at least on a life with such varied pursuits, one might write to any extent. The regular biographer will come in after years. It is enough for a mere essayist to sketch, or strive to sketch, in some rude outline, the nature of the man.

THE MONETARY CRISIS OF 1857.

(*National Review*, January, 1858.)

Report from the Select Committee on the Bank Acts; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, July 30, 1857.

Debate in the House of Lords on the Bank-Issues Indemnity Bill, on the 11th December, 1857. Reported in *Times* Newspaper of December 12th.

Debate in the House of Commons on the Reappointment of the Bank Charter Committee, on the same day, and reported in the same journal.

FOR once the serious attention of business-men is applied to the subject of the currency. The recent commercial crisis, bringing anxiety to all active merchants; the failure of many houses believed to be solvent, and of some who really were so; the suspension of the Act of 1844, which, being a repetition of what happened in 1847, looks, to say the least, like an indication of defect in that famous piece of legislation,—these circumstances and others have called to the topic of the currency the real minds of many who generally regard it as the peculium of dry economists, and the puzzle of captious speculators. In Lombard Street, on Thursday the 12th of November, there was no denying that the bank-note question was a practical one. Some months ago, a parliamentary committee elaborately investigated much of the subject; it was curious to compare the listless curiosity of its speculative interest with the eager queries,—"Will the Act be upset?" "What will the Government do?" "Is the Governor come back from Downing Street?"

This crisis throws a more remarkable light on our banking practice and currency legislation, because it does not seem to

be the result of any circumstances so peculiar that we may not often expect to see others of which the effects may be the same. The circumstances of 1847 have been put aside of late years as exceptional. The extreme errors of the Bank directors, the railway mania, the bad harvest, were singularities of that time, and might never be expected to recur; at least, not all of them at one time, or in so aggravated a form. The present year has no such peculiar features. Our domestic trade—the trades of banking and money-dealing perhaps in part excepted—is, on the whole sound.[1] Considering the enormous development which our commerce, whether of export or import, has recently undergone, few thoughtful men looked without some apprehension at the probability of a severe pressure. Most of them perhaps really anticipated a good many mercantile failures from domestic and personal causes. There have scarcely been any; of large firms exceedingly few.

The trade of two important foreign markets has been deranged by circumstances peculiar to them; we have been affected, naturally and inevitably, by these derangements; but except among a few bill-brokers and money-lending companies no one, even with the acute anger of disappointed theory, has been able to find blamable error in our national trade.

The time is not yet come for attempting to estimate or analyse the causes of the American panic, or of the extensive failures in the North of Europe. We have hardly as yet the facts before us. We have enough to refute a few old popular fallacies. We know that they did not arise from any excess of paper currency; for in Hamburg, where the disasters have been greater than anywhere else, they have a pure metallic currency; and in New York, which seems the centre of the monetary disasters of America, it has been proved by figures that there was no extension of the bank circulation of any im-

[1] The chief exception to the remark that our trade is of itself sound, occurs in the houses connected with the North of Europe, who contrary to what might have been expected, have not stood so well as the American houses. This exception is not, however, one of sufficient importance to affect our general argument.

portance at all.[1] Our knowledge is only as yet, however, sufficient for the purposes of refutation; we do not know enough to advance a comprehensive and positive theory. We clearly discern, however, that the trade of the North of Europe has been conducted for a very considerable period on a most unwholesome system of fictitious credit. Houses in Hamburg have given their names to acceptances for which they did not know what was the equivalent—for which, in point of fact, there was no equivalent. These acceptances were discounted on the faith of the acceptor; and, though with changes of amount and detail, in reality renewed whenever they became due. The acceptor of course ran a great risk, as his liability was for a very large sum; but he considered that he was remunerated by a commission, of which doubtless the proceeds were considerable. Every system of renewed acceptance is, however, unpleasantly affected by a tightness in the discount market: the old bill becomes due with an unfailing rapidity, but the new bill which is to replace it can only be discounted slowly, after a hesitation, after a conversation with the banker—in the end, cannot be discounted at all. Such a pressure in the discount market, was produced at Hamburg by the continued drain of silver to the East—silver being there the standard of value and the metal stored as bullion—and by the American panic, which largely affected the continental city most immediately connected with the Transatlantic trade.

[1] The *Economist* of the 28th November, 1857, gives the following figures as representing the state of the New York banks at their respective dates :—

	Capital.	Circulation.	Specie.
August, 1847 . .	43,214,000	25,098,000	11,983,000
June, 1856 . .	92,334,000	30,705,000	18,510,000
September, 1857 .	107,507,000	27,122,000	14,321,000

Yet many considerate persons still impute the disasters of the country to the mismanagement of the currency. Even Mr. Cardwell, in the debate on the reappointment of the Bank Committee, allowed himself to use language which would convey such an impression: "You have gone through a great disaster, emanating from a country, let it never be forgotten, that has this convertible currency, every bank of which has suspended payment," etc.—*Times*, Saturday, December 12th.

After all that has been said of the "dashing" system of Liverpool trade, after every concession to the opponents of "re-discount" and "fictitious" bills, it is nevertheless not without pride that we may compare the consequences of the American panic on the North of England with its effects at Hamburg. The stability of Liverpool, Manchester, and of the vast industrial region which is situated round them, can only be explained by a generally sound state of industry. At what former period could a great failure of remittances, a great contraction of accommodation, a ten-per-cent. rate of discount, have been borne by the most enterprising of our traders with so few disasters? We can only hope that the next time an American panic occurs, it may find us equally well prepared; very much better, we fear, looking to the past experience of commerce, it would be over-sanguine to expect. That panics will occur every now and then in many of the countries with which in our ramified trade we largely deal, it is impossible to question. We may not in many cases be able to trace them by very indisputable reasoning to causes we know to be real: at the present moment there is a mist over the whole topic of the American disasters; we indistinctly discern a vast series of investments in railways, hastily planned, and still more hastily made; we think we can see that an incautious course of banking has very extensively aided these over-rapid efforts. Thus, though we are suffering from the effects of the disease, we have not yet been able to set forth in facts and figures an accurate description of its causes. The point, however, which it behoves us especially to have in our minds, is that neither at Hamburg nor in America have any events happened so singular or out of the common course of mercantile things that we can be sure of their not happening again,—that we cannot reasonably anticipate anything but an occasional repetition of them, either in the same places or in others,—that we must settle our mercantile usage, our banking practice, our currency laws, to suit the recurrence, not unfrequently, of events very similar and as dangerous.

If we look attentively at these subjects, as the very great importance of these remarks should incline us seriously to do,

we shall perhaps be struck by two conspicuous facts—the development in this country of an extensive—possibly a too extensive—system of credit, and the existence of a law which aggravates all disturbances and hesitations in that system of credit.

Nothing can strike the mind of an observer, who can sufficiently abstract his thoughts from the crowding detail of affairs to be alive to the just impression of great facts, more than the slight effect which the recent monetary panic, which we have seen pass like an epidemic across the two sides of the Atlantic, has produced on the trade of France. This time last year we heard many complaints that the imperial government, its stock-jobbing courtiers, the *Crédit Mobilier*, had produced a state of things in that country fraught with danger to European nations. At that period we took occasion to show, that though these accusations by no means appeared to be without a foundation, yet that the speculative temper so induced did not penetrate very deep into the country, and that its common and legitimate commerce was in all likelihood sound. The trial has come, and the truth has been found to be so. In fact, the trade of France is, as compared with the trade of more enterprising nations, so strictly a ready-money trade, that it is not possible to create any wild panic among those who are concerned in it. If you trust no one, you need not be in a fright as to those you trust; the deferred payment for extensive purchases is the primitive element of commercial credit; it is this which creates bills of exchange, promissory notes, drawings, indorsements: where that element does not exist, there is no occasion for credit and confidence; everything is settled at the time. The same is the case with lending and borrowing. Where everybody keeps his own money, no one need be alarmed, or need care as to the solvency of those around him. All banking, as well as all "the industry of credit," is based on trust. The revolutions which have been so frequent in France, by inevitably disturbing all contemplated transactions, have been so fatal to this essential confidence, that no ramified system of commercial credit has ever grown up there. Something too—such at least was the doctrine of

Burke—of a timorous and peddling spirit may lurk in the recesses of the national character. At any rate, the result is certain; the trade of France is so little based upon borrowing or trust, that it is not exposed to a panic such as Lombard Street and Wall Street have experienced.

Our own system of commerce is precisely the reverse. A certain energy of enterprise is the life of England. Our buoyant temperament drives us into action; our firm judgment makes us steady in real danger; our solid courage is inapprehensive of fanciful risk; an impassive want of enjoyment in that which we are prompts us to try to be better than we are. Accordingly our commercial men have for years been prone to great undertakings; possibly there may not be in the world at this moment a single and adventurous speculation in which there is not some sum of Anglo-Saxon capital. The probity which, after every deduction, is really, as compared with most active nations, a conspicuous feature in the English character, has enabled us to aid our enterprises by a vast and elaborate system of credit, based on defined trust, and tested by verified anticipation. Both of the two elements of commercial credit, of which we have just spoken incidentally, exist among us to a greater extent than anywhere else in Europe. A deferred payment for large purchases is more general than elsewhere; wholesale dealers, as a rule, give and take very large credit. Our borrowing and banking systems draw from the pockets of the people every sixpence which is not wanted at once; and place it, through the intervention of bankers and brokers, at the command of the mercantile and active community. So deeply has this penetrated among the mercantile community, as to have become, perhaps even to a perilous extent, the habit of the money-lenders themselves. A correspondent of the *Economist*, who writes under the signature of "A Banker," has described this plainly: "The certain fact is, that, according to the existing practice, no private banker keeps more actual coin than he wants for daily necessary occasions. In London, the Bank of England is the bankers' bank. Especially since the admission lately of the great joint-stock banks to the clearing-house, no London banker keeps in his till more coin,

or even more bank-notes, than the minimum he can get on with. If there is any unusual demand on him for payments across the counter, he draws a cheque and gets it cashed at the Bank. The Bank of England is to him what he is to his customer—the source of supply in case of need. Country bankers probably for the most part keep more cash, because they are further from the focus. As they have further to send when they want fresh supplies, their supply of current cash must be larger. This does not, however, affect the principle. Country bankers, I apprehend, as well as London bankers, only keep the minimum in their tills which their ordinary business plainly requires; the rest of their reserve is kept at the bill-brokers, or with London bankers, who all keep accounts at the Bank of England, and who, as I have said, keep nothing anywhere else except the narrowest and most necessary minimum. The consequence is, that there is no other large pecuniary hoard in the country on which a drain of bullion can act except that which is in the vaults of the Bank." The inevitable consequence of this is, that when by any terrifying circumstance or perilous calamity the confidence between man and man is disturbed, our danger is considerable and our suffering extreme. We have made necessary to our vast transactions a system of delicate machinery; by some blow from without, or defect from within, that machinery will be occasionally impaired. Our hard capital is clothed in a soft web-work of confidence and opinion; on a sudden it may be stripped bare, and with pain to our prosperity.

We may perhaps doubt whether this system of enterprise and trust has not occasionally been carried too far. When we consider the vast extent of English trade, it is not satisfactory to think that a single establishment holds our entire bullion reserve. The fact is a consequence, not of the natural growth of commerce, but of legislative interference with that growth. By a series of enactments and a course of policy which, even if we had the space, it would be inopportune at present to describe, the English Government have given to the Bank a vast, and, until lately, a nearly absolute predominance in the London district. The consequence has been, that

not unnaturally, all inferior banks have clustered around it. As there was no doubt of the solvency of the Bank of England (seeing that, even in 1797, when the Bank had no money, the Legislature intervened and said it need have no money), all other bankers, instead of running the risk—and, as experience has shown, the considerable risk—of keeping their own metallic reserve, place that reserve at the Bank, and draw it out by cheque as they want it. Obvious convenience has fixed the habit too deeply in our existing system to permit a hope of its removal: but it has the inevitable, and perhaps dangerous, result of placing under the uncontrolled management of a single set of directors the sole hoard of actual cash—the only fund we have to draw on for international payments, for foreign wars, or domestic panics. Under a more natural system, a set of banks of nearly equal magnitude, and nearly equal prestige, would have grown up, as very recently the London joint-stock banks have in fact grown up; and each of these, having no reason for particular friendship with any other, would have kept its own reserve. We are almost reviving the Aristotelic definition when we say that oligarchy is the government of wealth: but in real and modern truth, the tendency of a mercantile community in each trade is towards the supremacy of a few large establishments enjoying the means of carrying on their respective trades at the greatest advantage, and, as the case may be, trusted by or giving credit to the smaller firms grouped and collected around them. The Bank of England is a *τύραννος*, who has overthrown this free constitution, and maintains by irresistible usage its unnatural supremacy. The effect has been seen lately; what the Act of Sir Robert Peel sets aside as the banking reserve has recently been reduced from several millions to £959,000; and then, by a violation of the law, to less than nothing. Even if we disregard the technical provisions of that statute, the entire bullion reserve held, both for the banking credit and the paper currency of England, was on the 18th of November £6,684,000; a very small amount, as will be almost universally admitted, when we consider the vast amount of the contingencies and liabilities against which it is held; and that,

in addition to these, it is liable to sudden calls to replenish, in case of need, the cash stores of Scotland and Ireland. We can hardly, with these circumstances before us, deny that we have pushed our system of credit rather too far,—have relied on too small a basis of actual capital, and incurred serious and needless danger from any vicissitude of foreign speculation.

Another circumstance, which has been much more dwelt on, but to which we ascribe much less importance, is the system pursued by the joint-stock banks of the North of England of lending the whole, or more than the whole, of their capital and deposits on the spot, and obtaining the necessary funds by re-discounting the north-country bills in London. Like every other contrivance of money-lending, this may be carried to an extreme at which it becomes dangerous; but within reasonable and proper limits, the system seems a proper and even an excellent one. The bills of Liverpool must be, in the main, good; for with all this pressure,—a pressure, too, likely to tell with unusual effect at the port which is the outlet and inlet of our American commerce,—very few Liverpool houses have suspended payment, when we consider the number of houses there are, and the complication as well as magnitude of their transactions. The Liverpool bills therefore are, in general, good securities for those who have money to lend. By the course of banking business, the bill-brokers and similar traders in London will have much to lend. The agricultural and nearly uncommercial counties of England, as anyone may see by looking at the map, are many: none of these, especially during the recent prosperity of agriculture, anything like employs its own money; the surplus funds of all these counties, by a natural gravitation, seek an outlet in the capital, which is the focus of national finance, and the market for securities best known and most accessible to the whole country. These funds are lent to bill-brokers, and joint-stock banks, who carry on a similar business—who are, in truth, bill-brokers as well as bankers; and by these they are employed in re-discounting the bills forwarded to London by the northern banks. In its essence, the system is this: A man in the north is

trustworthy, and wants money; a man in the south has money, but does not know who is trustworthy; a middleman in London knows who is trustworthy, and lends the money of the south to the man in the north. Of course, as re-discounting is a system of extensive borrowing, it is exposed to all the evils incidental to every system of extensive borrowing. The banks which require re-discounts should, as a rule, confine them within limits which they can be sure of obtaining in times of adversity as well as of prosperity—should have distinct arrangements with bill-brokers to re-discount within those limits —and should select good bill-brokers who are able to perform those engagements. These are, *mutatis mutandis*, the same conditions which every prudent merchant who requires discounts would make with his banker who gives such discounts; and if these conditions be duly complied with, both re-discounts and discounts are safe to the borrower, and distribute with singular advantage the capital of the nation.

It is much to be regretted that members of parliament should have spent, in attacking the really beneficial system of re-discounts, the moral influence which might be applied with so much effect to other parts of our banking system. The obvious convenience which we have explained will insure to that system a longevity far greater than that which can be expected by peer or representative. The use of parliamentary eloquence is not to bewail fixed habits, but to improve improvable habits. If the re-discounting system has been pushed too far, as is possible, the effect is owing to the condition of the bill-broking trade in London, the state of which is certainly not in accordance with strict principle and may not perhaps be practically safe.

In its theory, nothing can be sounder than this trade. Money is received commonly in considerable sums; an interest is paid for them, smaller if they are to be repaid on demand and greater if they are only to be repaid after the expiration of a notice: this money is employed in the discount of commercial bills—the kind of security which runs off most regularly and most constantly, and which in times of scarcity and anxiety admits most easily of being curtailed. On the

surface this would appear the safest kind of banking; the way of employing the money is the best; so much of the money is only repayable after a notice that the reserve which need be retained is smaller than usual. This apparent safety, however, is at present vitiated by a single fact. The rate of interest now given is so high, that the business would become unprofitable if any reserve were kept at all. Of this fact, which is familiar to those who are in any degree acquainted with the practice of Lombard Street, there is a very distinct explanation in the recent parliamentary inquiry furnished by a very experienced witness. The most influential partner in the house of Overend, Gurney, and Co., the most important house in the bill-broking trade, is examined as follows:—

"5206. You are aware, as you have referred to the habits of banking business, that it is the habit of the Bank of England, as well as, I believe, of other bankers, to keep a certain amount of their deposits in bank-notes in reserve?—Certainly.

"5207. Do the money-dealing houses in Lombard Street act on the same principle with regard to that money which is left in their hands at call?—They could not afford to do it; it is not the nature of their business, except under circumstances of danger as to the currency; they could not afford to pay interest for money and not to use it; it is the nature of their business to bring into action and useful employment the banking money of the country; it is their business to use it.

"5208. Do you, then, think that they may safely use all the money which they borrow, in lending it out at interest, provided it is on safe security?—Assuming that they employ it on bills of exchange falling due *de die in diem*, then experience shows that they may do it safely, without any hazard.

"5209. Without keeping any reserve beyond a banking balance?—Certainly. How could I afford to pay five or six per cent. for money if I did not use it? It would be certainly the road to ruin."

At first sight this seems contrary not only to abstract argument, but to evident prudence. How can other people's

money be securely kept, a good deal of it on demand and the rest of it at a short notice (seven days is the usual period), if all of it is invested; and if none is retained in the till to meet sudden demands? The doctrine that a reserve is necessary to borrowers so situated has been maintained *ad nauseam* by all theorists on banking. The same authority, however, has explained the expedient by which it is rendered, as he thinks, safe, and, as all will agree, less entirely insecure. The explanation is rather long, but is curiously illustrative of real life:—

"5192. Then you think that the Bank of England could not stop discounting for the discount houses in Lombard Street, at particular times at least, without creating great injury to the commercial community?—I think it would create very great injury indeed. Of course the Bank Directors would use their own discretion; if they saw these houses discounting very long bills with them, and bills which were not suitable in any way, I take for granted they would not take them. Of course that would not affect the general question; but assuming that there is a drain upon the monetary system, and that the great money-dealers are driven to convert their bills more quickly than they fall due, I think it would be a very great calamity for the Bank to hesitate for a single moment; I cannot conceive any greater.

"5193. No matter what the reserve of the Bank of England was at the time?—Certainly.

"5194. Then you think that that is one of the grounds, in addition to those four which you have stated, which ought properly to be included in an act of parliament as a ground for infringing the act?—I hardly understand that point.

"5195. You gave four grounds as reasons for an alteration of the act at particular periods, but you did not enumerate that to which I have just alluded. Do you think that that is one which ought to be included in the provisions of the act of parliament?—I will mention a case, if you will allow me to refer to the house which I represent, because this is a fact which has taken place before. About twenty years ago, the Bank tried to adopt that course; I am obliged to speak

personally, which I hope you will excuse. I happened to have been absent from London for three or four weeks: I came back to town, and found the whole of Lombard Street as if we had had a dark cloud hanging over it; our desk was piled with bills of the very finest commercial character; I said to my partner, 'Mr. Gurney, what in the world has happened? Why do you not discount these bills?' He said, 'Because the Bank have intimated that they are doubtful whether they will discount for us.' I said, 'It is impossible.' He said, 'It is perfectly true; and therefore we will not discount the bills.' I was quite shocked; I went over to the Bank, the Governor then was Sir John Rae Reid, and Sir Henry Pelly was the Deputy Governor; it was about 1839. I told them exactly what had taken place, and what the effect of their act had been. I said, 'We have taken care of ourselves; it is not that we want the money for ourselves, because we have our bills to rely on, and unless there is a regular conspiracy, we shall not mind anybody. But we have to supply the public. You have stopped the issue of notes to us; and if you, who have been in the habit of supplying us with money when we required it, will not do so now, we, on the other hand, will not supply the public.' I satisfied them that if they wished to curtail transactions, which was really their object, the way to do it was to make us act harmoniously with the Bank. Sir John Rae Reid said at once, 'I perfectly understand you'; and after a little consultation he said, 'If they are all proper bills, go and discount away; and if you want money, come to us.' I went home, and told them what had taken place. It not only affected us, but it affected the whole of Lombard Street; this dark cloud disappeared, and a perfect sunshine took place in an instant. We discounted everything; and, as far as my memory serves me, I do not think we went to the Bank for a shilling; there was no interruption to the ebb and flow of the banking money. But when the Bank of England said, 'You shall not have it,' the effect was to lock up millions immediately; for a large portion of the Banking money deposited with us is in great masses, because the parties know that they can have it in a moment.

If, in our own arrangements between ourselves and the Bank, the Bank say, 'We will not do this,' all that is stopped in a moment; and those millions, which would otherwise be of benefit to the public, under existing circumstances become immediately locked up; because people say, 'We would rather have no interest at all, than have a doubt about our getting the money in case we require it.' "

Probably this is a satisfactory resource if the Bank of England is ready at all times, and willing at all times, to give the re-discount required. A man may advance every shilling of borrowed money on securities which he is sure that he can pledge in any quantity and at any time. But can these traders be sure that the Bank will be at all times so able and so willing?

Of the willingness of the Bank there need be no question. Its leading director has explained the system on which it acts. Mr. Norman is asked:—

"3527. The advances of the Bank of England are made through what is called the Discount Office?—The greatest part of them.

"3528. What is the nature of the Discount Office?—It is a very anomalous institution, because the Bank is supposed to hold out an offer to everybody to lend money to any amount on bills of exchange at a rate of interest fixed by itself, and subject, first of all, to variations in the rate of interest, and then to certain other contingencies, such as a diminution in the *échéance*, and an occasional rejection of securities ordinarily admitted.

"3529. Is it not principally by raising the rate of interest that you check the amount of discounts which may be so demanded of you?—Yes; we have found, contrary to what would have been anticipated, that the power we possess, and which we exercise, of raising the rate of discount, keeps the demand upon us within manageable dimensions. There are other restrictions which are less important. The rate we charge for our discounts we find, in general, is a sufficient check."

The power of the Bank is far less evident. If Sir R. Peel's Act is to be retained, and really acted on during a crisis of

difficulty, that power would, if we may trust our experience, not exist. When there was less than a million in the reserve of notes, it was quite certain that the Bank could not make unlimited advances. Unquestionably, by keeping a much larger reserve in times of security, the Bank may retain the power of making these sudden and large advances in times of insecurity. And if the Bank directors in the forthcoming inquiry mean to support the Act of 1844, they most certainly should assure the public that they will in future adopt that expedient. It is idle for them to undertake to make very great loans, and also to defend an Act which limits their means, unless they can show us that by judicious management these means can be made practically adequate to such advances. They must either abandon the argumentative defence of the statute of restriction, or they must show us how the business which they profess to carry on can be managed within the provisions of that statute. And even irrespectively of the conditions of this Act, a cautious banker hardly likes to be under an engagement to make advances however great, in times of difficulty however severe. It may be safe, but it does not sound safe. A much larger reserve of bullion than six or seven millions seems quite necessary to render the profession to afford such advances even plausible.

We are therefore of opinion, that though the state of other trades in England was as satisfactory during the present autumn as we can in general hope to have it, the condition of the money-lending trade was critical, and perhaps perilous. We think that the reserve held by the Bank for its banking liabilities was dangerously low; especially when we remember that this is the only actual cash reserve for all the banking liabilities of the country. We believe that the bill-brokers of Lombard Street incur serious risk in depending on the ability of the Bank to make unlimited advances at moments when money is remarkably scarce. On both these points we have the same fault to find with the money-lenders: that they have developed too highly the system of credit—in more graphic, though less elegant words, that they have "used up their money too close"; and do uot keep enough of it

unemployed to meet the contingency of an occasional pressure.

As we are using phraseology so similar, we would desire, however, to distinguish ourselves particularly from those persons who impute the principal error in the over-development of the system of credit in London to the joint-stock banks, which are now so remarkable a feature in its pecuniary system. We have no desire to enter the lists for everything which these banks have done; we should be inclined, on a proper occasion, to maintain that they have committed errors; and that, in consequence of the law which requires that every shareholder shall be liable for the debts of the bank to his last shilling and his last acre, there are defects in their management which it will be difficult to amend. Still, on the whole, the joint-stock banks of London have stood remarkably well; not only have none of them failed, but none of them have been in danger of failing. They have now gone quite safely through a general pressure, and some time since they passed through a special pressure consequent on the failure of the Royal British Bank; and in both cases the result has been beneficial. It is quite true that they have adopted the bill-broker's business; but they have divested it of the dangers of which we have spoken. Being possibly conscious that, as apparent, and perhaps in some degree real, competitors of the Bank of England, they might not find extreme favour with the authorities of the "Discount Office," the joint-stock banks do not rely on the support of that establishment in times of difficulty. Mr. Chapman the bill-broker, whom we have more than once cited, has given evidence on this point which we must believe to be conclusive, as it is in favour of those whom he admits to be his competitors. "Is it," he is asked, "within your experience that the London joint-stock banks, such as the London and Westminster and other banks, re-discount their bills?" "I never heard of such a thing." "Then in that respect the London joint-stock banks differ materially in their mode of carrying on business from that which is adopted by the discount houses in Lombard Street, do they not?" "Certainly they do; because it is our business to sell our bills

again, and they do not sell their bills again that I know of." These banks are enabled to carry on this course of business without recourse to the expedient which those who first practised it have been compelled to rely upon, because their situation is in one most important respect far more advantageous. The bill-brokers pay an interest for all the money which they borrow; the banks which compete with them have a great deal of money on the balances of drawing accounts for which they pay no interest—they can afford to keep idle some of their cheap money in order to provide for the occasional withdrawal of the money for which they pay highly. Of course they do this at the expense of a diminution in the profits which they might derive from the other parts of their banking business. If they did not keep their money idle for this peculiar purpose, they might employ it in the common way, and obtain a profit upon it. But this is a matter which may be safely left to the practised pecuniary judgment of the managers. If they carry on such a business, we may without rashness infer that it is a profitable one. Possibly they may, from an implied engagement to give for money one per cent. less than the minimum rate of discount, have been recently induced to give higher rates for deposits than we shall be likely to see again; perhaps the time of notice in which they hold their interest-bearing deposits may be too short; but these are points of detail—on a general view of the subject they must be considered to have diminished one of the most serious risks of the bill-broking business, at the same time that they have continued to afford to the public all characteristic advantages.

We do not consider as important arguments in favour of the conclusion that the system of credit has been perhaps too largely developed in England, the reckless advances which appear to have been made by the three large banks which have failed in Scotland and the North. In a great country like this there will always be some unsound banks, as well as some insolvent merchants. Two of these banks nearly suspended payment, and perhaps should have suspended payment, in 1847; and the other has been well known in the banking world

for a speculative and exceptional business. We would not ground our conclusion on any singular and casual facts. We wish to base it solely on the small amount of cash, especially of cash available for banking liabilities, held by the Bank of England; and on the exclusive reliance of Lombard Street, and indirectly of the rural bankers, on the Bank of England.

This extreme development of credit must of course be attended with peril during a crisis, in whatever manner that crisis may be occasioned. Every crisis must disturb confidence; and credit is the effect of trust and confidence. We cannot but believe, however, that during the last two months the peril of this inevitable disturbance of credit has been much enhanced by our peculiar legislation. The proof of this seems to us to lie on the surface of the subject. The cause of panic is the expectation of insolvency. People who have during many years given long and large credit, become apprehensive, and wish to be paid in cash immediately. The peril of this state of feeling is measured by the amount of cash which is available to meet the demands for such repayment. As we have explained, the sole reserve applicable to such repayments during a pressure on Lombard Street is the banking reserve of the Bank of England. Previously to the Act of 1844, the Bank of England resembled the Bank of France, and held a single reserve of coin and bullion against all its liabilities, whether to note-holders or depositors. If this state of things had continued, the reserve of cash applicable to a domestic panic, and its proportion to the claims upon it, would have been shown by the following figures:—

	Liabilities.	Bullion.
	£	£
October 3 . .	39,070,000	10,662,000
„ 10 . .	39,032,000	10,109,000
„ 17 . .	37,017,000	9,524,000
„ 24 . .	36,711,000	9,369,000
November 4 . .	37,862,000	8,497,000
„ 11 . .	39,286,000	7,170,000
„ 18 . .	41,679,000	6,684,000

"The result of which is, that the Bank reserve, beginning at about one-fourth of its general liabilities, was reduced to

between one-sixth and one-seventh of them in five weeks. In that space of time, while the liabilities have been increasing, one-third of the bullion reserve has been abstracted." This is evidently an account likely to create a serious feeling in the minds of attentive and cautious men. It would have convinced many of them, at least in our judgment, that our credit system rested on a basis dangerously small: but it is evidently an account requiring to be looked at with attention, and reasoned upon after consideration; it would not produce a frantic alarm in the minds of any of those who are incapable of steady reasoning, and are solely acted on by the tendencies of the moment, and the opinions of those around them. The extreme danger of a period of discredit consists in the frantic alarm which it occasions among such unreflective and undiscriminating persons. Sir Robert Peel's Act enjoins a form of account which is felicitously apt to catch and rivet the minds of such persons. The amount applicable to the banking liabilities of the Bank of England, so long as the ordinary business of the Bank is going on, is the reserve in the banking department; this, it is true, consists of notes, but these are exchangeable on the other side of the Bank for bullion, and may therefore be regarded as tickets for so much bullion. The history of this reserve, and of the liabilities, to which it is applicable, is as follows:—

		Reserve.	Deposits.
		£	£
September	19 . .	6,108,000	17,047,000
„	26 . .	6,014,000	17,654,000
October	3 . .	4,606,000	18,245,000
„	10 . .	4,024,000	18,169,000
„	17 . .	3,217,000	15,965,000
„	24 . .	3,485,000	16,124,000
„	31 . .	2,258,275	16,649,000
November	4 . .	2,155,000	16,781,000
„	11 . .	957,000	17,249,000

"Starting on the 19th of September with a reserve of more than one-third of the deposits, the Bank reserve was reduced on the 11th of November to less than one-eighteenth; and even supposing the £2,000,000, said to have been withdrawn for Scotland and Ireland not to have been so withdrawn, that

reserve would have been under one-fifth." Now these are figures which can be read not only by a man who runs, but by a man running very fast. The most inconsiderate mind must be struck by an account which shows so frightful a decrease of available resources. Every one, in truth, was so struck at a much earlier period than the last of the above dates; and the result was the panic of 1857. We think all candid persons should allow, that whatever other advantages the Act of 1844 may have, its effect just then was to aggravate seriousness into apprehension, and apprehension into terror.

This effect is the more perverse, because the first of the accounts, as legal authorities tell us, represents the real state of the Bank, and the other only embodies a theoretical form of account. This may seem unlikely to persons only slightly familiar with the subject; but it will not seem so to those who have studied the controversies in which the theory of the Act of 1844 originated. According to the accomplished persons who suggested that theory, it was desirable that the amount of the paper circulation (whether including the reserve of notes in the Bank of England, or excluding it, was by no means clear) should conform to the fluctuation of the bullion in the Bank; that for every new five pounds of bullion there should be a new five-pound note somewhere, and that for every new five-pound note there should be a new five pounds of bullion somewhere. The framers of the Act looked at the matter with the eyes of the economists rather than with those of lawyers. They wished that the five-pound note and the five pounds of bullion should always co-exist; but they did not care to appropriate or earmark the bullion for the payment of the note. They wished, as Lord Overstone has expressed it, that the note should be "the shadow" of the metal; but they did not especially care to enforce a legal tie between them. In the same way, the same school of legislators and thinkers enacted expressly that gold should go down to Scotland as a basis for the note circulation (above a certain limit); and yet did not at all specifically appropriate it to that circulation. In a word, it was rather the representative character of the note that they were anxious to secure, and not its convertibility, in its obvious

meaning that whoever has a five-pound note should be sure of having five pounds in gold for it. It struck these theorists as immaterial whether the note-holder had the five pounds, or some one else had it.

The consequence has been, that a fictitious form of account, which really gives no priority to the note-holder over the depositor, appears to give such priority, and that the depositor is frightened into panic by the idea of his postponement; although it is not true.

The evils of a crisis so produced and so aggravated are of a complicated nature; and it would require much more space than we have at our disposal to specify all of them. A knowledge of one of them, however, is particularly important to a correct understanding of very recent events. By one of the most elaborate contrivances of our commercial system, credit, in its various forms, is largely employed as a currency. The bank-note is one of the most obvious forms of this; it is a mere promise to pay, but in its transference from hand to hand it closes bargains as effectually as gold itself. The bank-note, however, though the earliest and simplest, is not by any means in our refined commerce the most operative form of the credit currency. The large wholesale transactions, which really determine the general price of important articles, are rarely now settled in bank-notes. The real instrument of large operations is the cheque. It is within the familiar experience of every one, that all the ordinary purchases of private life are now so settled; the large purchases of trade are so also. Some people have a notion that a cheque is not currency because it is immediately paid and cancelled; but this is a mistake of fact. Very few cheques, in comparison with the whole number, are really paid over the counter in sovereigns. The person who receives a cheque probably keeps a banker, and pays the cheque into his account with such banker: if the latter is the banker on whom the cheque is drawn, the cheque is "paid" by a simple transfer from the account of the drawer to that of the payee; even if the banker of the drawer is a different person from the banker of the payee, the process is the same. The rural bankers, as a rule,

settle their accounts in London. All London bankers settle their accounts at the "clearing house"; that is, they see what cheques each holds payable by the others, set off an equal amount one against another, and pay the balance themselves by a cheque on the Bank of England. Every London Banker has an account at the Bank of England, from which the cheque so drawn, by a slightly complex machinery of book-keeping which we need not explain, is transferred to the account of the banker who is to receive it. By this artificial arrangement, cheques drawn in Dorsetshire or Lancashire are really paid by transfers in the deposits of the Bank of England. No sovereigns or notes pass at all; the whole is a matter of book-keeping. It is evident that all this supposes a general feeling of confidence in the banking community. If every person who received a cheque took fright about the stability of the banker on whom it was drawn, or the adequacy of the provision made by such drawer in the hands of that banker for its payment, the system would be at an end. If every person who received a cheque rushed at once to the banker and obtained coin for it, there would be no room for this currency of set-offs, and the work of the clearing-house would cease altogether. In times of panic there is a good deal of this. If at such a period there is a run on the bill-brokers of Lombard Street (as there is understood to have been last November for two or three days after the stoppage of Messrs. Sandeman and Saunderson), a good deal of it is taken in bank-notes. Nervous persons do not like to trust to the operations of the clearing-house, which they will not know for some hours; especially if they hold securities, they will be very unwilling to rely on this distant process, or to part with them except on the payment of bank-notes. The expectation of this process produces even a worse effect than its reality. Every money-dealer, especially every country banker, who cannot from geographical difficulties at once replenish his stores, strengthens himself to meet the sudden demands of apprehensive persons. He has no confidence that other people will have confidence, and he provides accordingly. The consequence is, that a larger amount of coin and bank-notes is

required in times when credit is large than in times when credit is small, because in our elaborate commercial civilisation we have coined credit itself into a currency.

These considerations afford the best reply to those theorists who seem to consider the letter from Lord Palmerston and Sir G. C. Lewis, permitting an additional issue of bank-notes upon securities, as a "debasement of the currency". The exact state of things was this: The knowledge of a limit prescribed by former legislation has produced a feeling of apprehension which has destroyed the efficiency of a portion of your currency. The real bargaining medium of the country is as much diminished, or rather is even more diminished, by the diffused nervousness which we have spoken of, than it would be by the failure of a country bank issuing notes. Yet it has been generally admitted that, in the case of such a failure, economic principle did not forbid, and obvious common sense warranted, an issue of other paper by solvent persons of credit to supply the vacuum which had been so created. We can acknowledge no distinction for this purpose between bank-notes and other forms of credit. The circulating medium of the country, in this relation, must be regarded as an entire whole; whatever by the course of usage settles our domestic transactions, is a part of it; and when any important part of it is destroyed or impaired, we can recognise no violation of principle in a development of that which is unimpaired. The place of that which is wanting may surely be supplied by the substitution of that which we have. In the instance before us, the case is even a stronger one. What caused the panic was the apprehension of the legislative limit; the mere removal of that limit was in itself equivalent to a great increase of currency, because it supported so much credit which by custom and habit was performing the functions of currency. Lord Overstone has observed of the circumstances of a former panic: "Look to the Government letter of 1847. What was the Government letter of 1847? Why, it was an indefinite increase of the Bank reserve. What was its effect? Not one note was put into what is called its active state. Not one single note passed out of the Bank in consequence of it; but

the Bank reserve was instantaneously augmented. What was the result? A miracle was instantaneously worked. The want of confidence was removed; everything became smooth and easy. The whole machinery of the credit system of the country which had been brought to a dead-lock, was immediately put in order, and everything went on with perfect ease." Can there be a more satisfactory testimony to the effect of the limit upon the issue of bank-notes in impairing the efficiency of the "credit currency" of the country, or of the instantaneous rapidity with which that credit currency is repaired by its removal? On the present occasion it has been necessary not only to erase, but to overstep the limit. There is hardly any one, in the midst of the facts, but will find, however, that the amount of circulating credit impaired by apprehension is very much greater than the not very considerable sum which has been issued beyond the law.

This affords also the reply to the suggestion of Lord Grey, that an issue of Exchequer-bills or stock would be more appropriate than an issue of notes. Neither of these would, however, repair the deficiency. A portion of the transferable credit which effects the purposes of money in the community has become inefficient; you can only substitute for it some other form of credit which will be efficient; and neither exchequer-bills nor stock are, in our present practice, capable of being used as money.[1]

There is, indeed, no other credit so well adapted as that of the Bank of England for sustaining and replacing other credits. Its central position, its great capital, its peculiar prestige, fit it especially for so doing; and if it kept a sufficient bullion reserve, and were unhampered by the restrictive operation of the Act of 1844, it could do so safely and without difficulty. The knowledge that it was able to do so would very likely

[1] To the issue of Exchequer-bills there would be the further objection that they were scarcely saleable; and if there had been a dream of any large new issue, they would have become unsaleable. The high price of stock, and the readiness with which loans could be obtained upon it, arises from the number of trustees and similar persons who are confined by settlements, etc., to that investment.

prevent a panic; and a judicious use of its power would mitigate and relieve a panic if it should occur. We are aware that this involves the necessity of intrusting our entire bullion reserve to the discretion of the Bank directors. But, as we have seen all of our bullion reserve which is held for the banking liabilities of the country (or, if any one likes it better, all the reserve of notes in the banking department) is at present intrusted to their discretion. They can, by errors in judgment and miscalculations of events, with facility reduce this part of our reserve to the zero at which it lately stood. Is there any great additional risk in giving them an entire control over the whole?

It is, indeed, alleged, and in part truly alleged, that the operation of Sir R. Peel's Act is to compel the Bank to make provision for a drain of bullion at an earlier period than it would otherwise have done. No one can deny that the Act of 1844 has been a most instructive scientific experiment; and the evidence recently given by the Bank authorities, as compared with that given by them ten years ago, certainly proves that they have learnt a good deal that is very valuable. But now that the precedent of breaking the Act is thoroughly established, we may well question whether the conduct of the Bank under it will be different from what that conduct would be without it. The resource of breaking the law will always be in the background of the mind. In overt argument the Directors may allege that they are not relying on such a resource; but patent facts will have their influence. They know that they can have a letter of licence if they choose; and they will never act as though they could not have it. Although, therefore, Sir R. Peel's Act, and the reasonings on its working, have taught us much valuable caution, we cannot expect that the Act will enforce a degree of prudence on the Bank which it would not exercise otherwise,—certainly not that the degree of extra prudence which we shall so obtain is worth the feverish apprehension which the knowledge of the restriction is sure to produce.

Some theorists have indeed said, that there should be a warning now and once for all explicitly given that the Act

shall be broken no more. We have seldom any faith in legislative "compacts" and promises fettering the inevitable discretion of future administrators. But in reality we have now something like a compact that the Act will be evaded when future circumstances are similar to those we have just passed through. Chancellors of the Exchequer are cautious men; the desire of cautious men is to be safe; the way to be safe is to follow a precedent. The boldest man in England would shrink from not following a precedent, when the inevitable and instantaneous result would be the failure of the Bank of England, and the consequent and irretrievable ruin of the banking and money-dealing community. No one who duly considers how formal is the habit, how extreme the prudence, and how tenacious the love of precedent in English statesmen, will have any idea that any of them will ever be so wedded by an abstract, an abstruse, and, in our judgment, an erroneous principle, as, in a pressing crisis, to accept such a responsibility.

Some statesmen have fancied they can elude the difficulty by carrying further the essential principle of the Act of 1844, vesting the business of issue in a Government department altogether and geographically separate from the Bank of England. We do not, however, perceive how, if that course had been adopted previously to the present crisis, it would have at all lightened our difficulties. The issue department of the Bank would have been at Somerset House; but the banking department would have been just in the same state that it was. The demand on it would have been the same, and its funds precisely the same. The destruction of the credit currency, such as we have described it, would have been exactly as important; the need of a remedy as urgent; the kind of remedy identical; public opinion would have pressed the Government to authorise an extra issue, just as now: indeed the pressure in all real likelihood would have been greater, because the interposition of an independent body like the Bank shields the Government from impatient clamour, and mitigates the apprehension of a factious political opposition. At any rate, men of the world will commonly believe that,

notwithstanding the change of form, the Government would have done exactly what they have now done. You may make a rigid rule easily enough; but where will you find a rigid statesman to adhere to that rule?

The separation of the issue department from the Bank is supported, as he himself tells us, by Mr. Gladstone, because he believes that it is a confusion of the business of issue with that of banking, which leads to the notion that it is the business of the Bank to aid trade without limitation in crises of difficulty. We have seen, however, that this notion rather arises from the habit of the Bank (as explained by Mr. Norman) to make advances at all times, to unlimited amounts on such securities as come within their peculiar rules, or only to check those advances by the greater rate of interest charged to the borrowers in times of scarcity. So long as the Bank has any such principle as this, no separation of the issue department from the banking department will weaken the pressure upon it. If the Bank of England were to define the limit of its advances to its regular customers, and not consider itself bound to make advances to any but its regular customers, no separation of the business of issue would be needful. We are not recommending this course—for it is not in the parenthesis of an article that the fundamental maxims of the most important corporation of the country can be discussed—we only say, if an alteration is needed, if it is undesirable that the Bank should be expected to advance without stint on occasions of scarcity—this alteration of their banking practice will be absolutely necessary, and will be enough to effect that which is required. A change in the geographical position of the power of issue would have upon it no effect whatever.

The next suggestion which is made by those who wish to retain the essential peculiarity of the Act of 1844, and at the same time to prevent the necessity of extra-legal and recurring suspensions of it, is the "elastic clause". The details of this proposal have never been very well worked out, and probably differ much in the minds of different theorists. The essential principle of it, under all variations, however, is, that at a certain point in a commercial crisis, either the Bank Directors

or the Government, or both together, should have a legal right to authorise an additional issue of notes upon securities. Some persons would restrict the power to occasions at which the bullion was below a certain point; others to times at which the rate of interest was as much as 10 per cent. or 12 per cent.; and others again to times at which the exchanges were not unfavourable to the country; but these persons are all agreed that at some point or other in the crisis some such step should be taken, and some power of taking such a step without infringing the law should be provided. If the Act of 1844 is to be retained, we can scarcely question that such a power should be given; and yet there are many and great difficulties in settling the way in which it should be conferred, and the persons to whom it should be intrusted. We may dispose—at least so it seems to us—almost at once of the suggestion for an exact pre-appointment of the occasions on which this exceptional discretion is to be exercised. The circumstances of commercial crises differ so very much, that even for the few of which we know the details it would not be easy to fix a machinery which would be uniformly applicable; and it would be immeasurably more difficult to prescribe beforehand, and in an enactment, for all which the future may have in store for us. We may have a domestic panic when the bullion in the issue department is above any point which we can exactly specify—when the rate of interest is 8 per cent. or 10 per cent.—during a foreign drain of bullion, or after it. No practical statesman will, it is probable, frame an elaborate proposal of this kind; persons conversant with complicated affairs are habitually averse to minute predescription, and to any profession of foreseeing more than it is possible to foresee. The most plausible of these contrivances is that which would fix the minimum rate of interest to be charged during the time that the Bank may avail itself of such exceptional issues; but even this is liable to the two objections—that it may happen that the minimum is fixed too high; and that the necessity of changing it, in order to obtain the needful notes, may impose a needless burden on the public during a time of difficulty: and secondly, that it only in appearance

limits the occasions on which the exceptional power may be exerted, since the fixing the rate of interest must necessarily be in the same hands as the exercise of that power, whether of the Chancellor of the Exchequer or of the Bank, or of both; and if those authorities at any time wish to avail themselves of the power, they can adjust the rate of interest accordingly. On the whole, therefore, if such a clause should be hereafter added to our legislation, it will probably be found necessary to leave the occasions on which it may be exercised, as well as the extent and manner of that exercise, to the unfettered discretion of some persons, and it will only be necessary to consider who those persons should be. At first sight, it seems absurd to place this expansive power in the sole discretion of the Bank directors. These are the persons, it should seem, whose discretion we cannot trust, and on whom we wish to impose a binding fetter; yet great difficulties arise when we attempt to vest any such power in any department of the executive government. As Mr. Gladstone has observed, nothing can be more foreign to our habits, and to the entire genius of our legislation and society, than that ministers of the crown should have to decide which commercial house or firm is to stand and which to fail. Yet in actual practice the discretionary employment of such an expansive power as is proposed does of necessity involve their having to decide such points. The power is only to be exercised in times of extreme pressure or of panic. What is to be the test of the extremity of the pressure? The only test is the stoppage or critical position of great commercial houses. The panic apprehension which brings such eminent firms into a crisis of difficulty can only be tested by communication with such firms, and an examination of their difficulties. No more delicate or unpleasant power can be placed in the hands of any minister, especially of a minister under a parliamentary government, who may be politically and closely connected with some commercial city, and have to decide on the ruin or prosperity of his warmest and most important supporters. Vesting the expansive power in the Government has also some of the inconveniences, just now so familiar to us, of a double

government. In 1847, the Bank directors maintained that the state of the Bank was a perfectly safe one, that they desired no help from the administration, and that the issue of Sir C. Wood's letter was only desirable—if desirable at all—for the general welfare of the commercial community. We do not know if there was any such "coquetting" on the last occasion; but in her Majesty's Speech, and in the debate, ministers appeared to take on themselves the full responsibility of the extra-legal act. In this there is certainly some anomaly. The Bank directors ought to regulate, and ought to be responsible for, all the acts of the Bank, whether legal or extra-legal; whether they were done in the common course of business, or under the authority of an "elastic clause". The legislative creation of such an expansive power, assumes that its existence is necessary and its employment at times desirable. The authorities of the Bank can hardly be permitted to abdicate all responsibility at these times—to manage in ordinary periods as they did in the year 1847, so as to aggravate the intensity of a great crisis; and then, in the moment of the most harassing difficulty, to devolve the entire care of the banking community upon the executive government. The warmest admirers of a duplicate administration will scarcely recommend that we should have one set of authorities to get us into trouble, and another set to get us out. We can hardly question, that if there is to be such an elastic element within the limits of the law, the Bank should have a share in the responsibility of withholding it or of setting it free. Possibly the best solution of these conflicting practical difficulties would be, to vest the responsible discretion of making or not making such exceptional issues in the Bank and the Government together. We would recommend that there should be a distinct application from the Bank to the financial executive for the permission to make such unusual issues, and an official reply from the Government authorising such issues to be made. We should then clearly know who was responsible for what has been done; the Bank directors, having expressly asked for permission to overstep the ordinary limit, could not in any degree evade an important share in the responsibility so